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HISTORY of WAR

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CITY UNDER SIEGE

LENINGRAD

Discover how the Soviet stronghold held back the Nazis

2001 - 2021

AFGHANISTAN

How will history judge the 20-year struggle?

PARIS 1870
How the Prussian army conquered the French capital

WAY OF THE SAMURAI
Why tea, philosophy and poetry were vital to Japan's warrior class

SPANISH CIVIL WAR
Inside the Nationalist rebellion that shocked Europe

FUTURE
ISSUE 098

KING & COUNTRY

UK AUTHORISED DEALER

IN FEBRUARY 1913, the Russian Royal Family, *the House of Romanov*, celebrated the *Tercentenary* of the founding of their ruling dynasty over the people of Russia and its far-flung empire.

As the Tsar, ***Nicholas II*** and his family enjoyed the adulation of millions of their most loyal subjects few would have predicted that in just over five years time the Russian monarchy would be abolished and the last of the Romanov dynasty would be brutally murdered!

These latest King & Country royal figures portray ***Tsar Nicholas*** himself standing beside his wife, the ***Tsarina Alexandra*** together with their only son, the ***Tsarevich Alexei***.

Father and son are both wearing the full dress ceremonial uniforms of ***Imperial Russian Guard Regiments***.

The Tsar's two youngest daugters ***Grand Duchesses Marie*** and ***Anastasia*** are more simply dressed in the then-fashionable female version of a sailor's costume complete with straw hats and pale blue ribbons.

IN THE BACKGROUND...

Lurking in the shadows of the Imperial family stands the sinister figure of ***Grigori Rasputin***, the self-proclaimed mystic and holy man who almost became part of the royal family and someone who wielded enormous influence in ***St. Petersburg*** court circles.

Rasputin caused untold harm to the Tsar and his family through his many intrigues and scandalous personal behaviour.

All of these figures represent a happier time for the Romanov dynasty before the cataclysm of ***The Great War*** erupted in August 1914 and swept them away together with many millions of their subjects.

The Royal Romanovs

The ***Tsarina*** wears an elegant ball gown with a small selection of her many awards and fabulous Royal jewel collection.

Also dressed formally are the family's two eldest daughters the ***Grand Duchesses Olga*** and ***Tatiana***. Both young ladies are uniformed as *Honorary Colonels* of elite ***Imperial Hussar & Lancer Regiments***.

TO FIND OUT MORE

For additional details about these special ***King & Country*** figures or K&C's many other historical series of ***1:30 scale, all-metal, hand-painted miniatures*** simply contact Britain's biggest K&C Dealer...

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Above: Schluesselburg is taken by the German army on 8 September 1941, completing the encirclement of Leningrad

Welcome

In September 1941, the second city of the Soviet Union, Leningrad, became encircled by German and Finnish forces, trapping some 2.5 million people. The ensuing siege lasted for nearly 900 days, during which time around 800,000 civilians were killed as a result of relentless bombardment and starvation after the Germans cut off nearly all supply routes to the city. The siege remains among the longest and bloodiest in military history, and an horrific example of the scale and barbarity of the war on the Eastern Front – starting on page 24 Jon Trigg recounts how it began.

Tim Williamson
Editor-in-Chief

CONTRIBUTORS

PETER JOHNSTON
Currently Head of Collections and Research at The Royal Air Force Museum, Peter was also formerly Head of Collections at the National Army Museum, London. This issue he spoke with Tom Garner, reflecting on the historical legacy of the War in Afghanistan (page 52).

ALEX BOWERS
New to History of War, Alex is an expert on Canadian military history, and this issue recounts the 1917 Halifax explosion – at the time the biggest detonation ever seen (p.46) – and on page 60 tells the story of a teenage Victoria Cross hero.

DAVID SMITH
History of War regular David turned his attention to the Siege of Paris for this month's Great Battles, detailing how the Prussian army surrounded the French capital and eventually ground its defenders into submission (page 38).

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CITY UNDER SIEGE
LENINGRAD

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The final stronghold of the Republican cause came under attack in the final months of the war

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This hardy American design served across all major theatres of the Second World War

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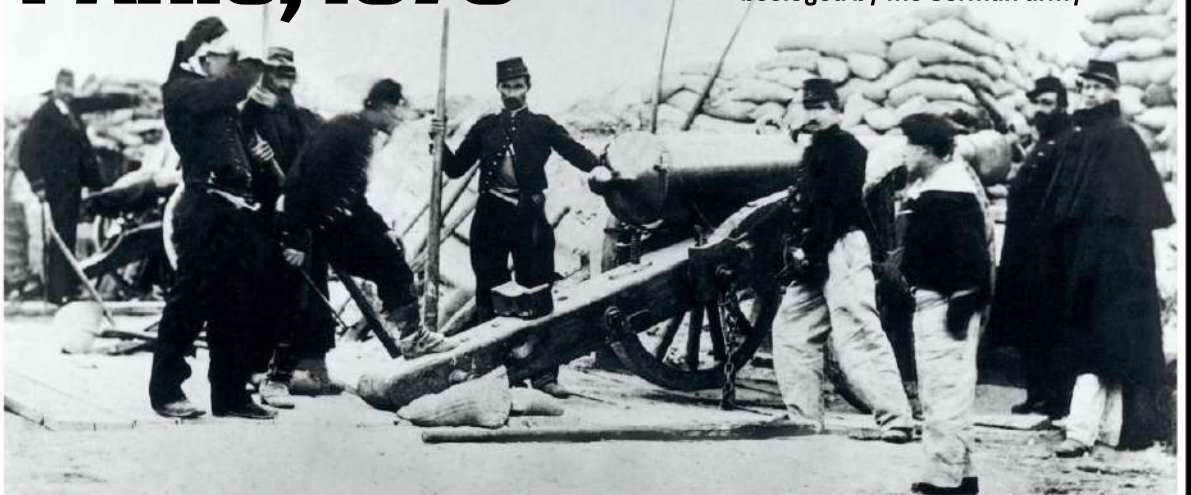
38 In the final months of the Franco-Prussian War, the French capital was besieged by the German army



WAR in FOCUS

LUNCHTIME FOR HITLER

28 August 1941

Hitler, Mussolini, field marshals Gerd von Rundstedt and Wilhelm Keitel, Joachim Ribbentrop and Alexander Loehr take lunch on the Eastern Front during Operation Barbarossa. Mussolini had arrived at Hitler's Eastern Front HQ, the Wolf's Lair, to discuss the progress of the Axis invasion, and the pair visited Krosno air base, eastern Poland, where they inspected German and Italian troops on the frontline. Although he had not been informed of the invasion ahead of time, Mussolini initially committed an expeditionary force of over 60,000 men to the front.

© Getty

WAR in FOCUS

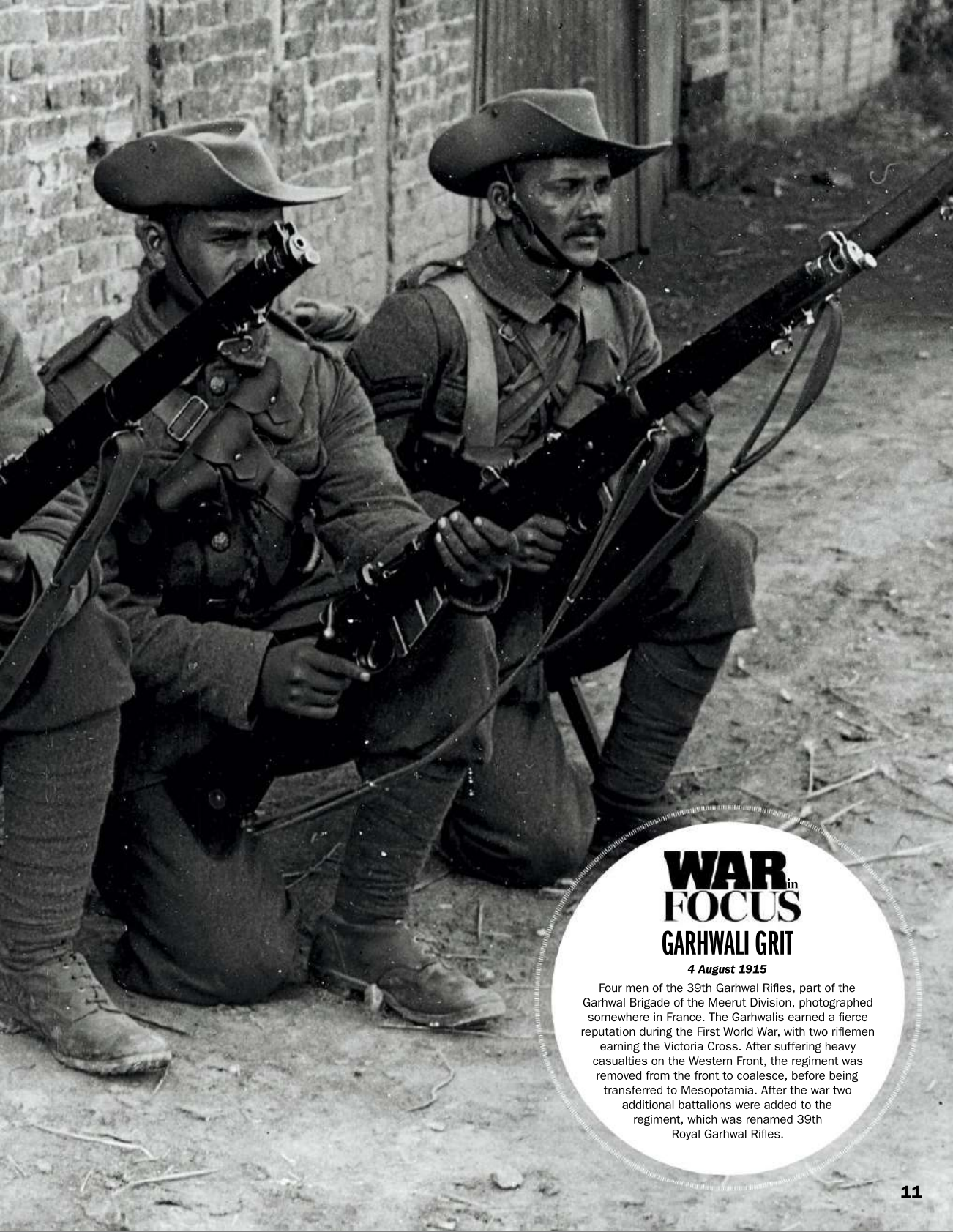
WINTER OF DISCONTENT

December 1989

A crowd of civilians hide behind an armoured vehicle in Republic Square, later renamed Revolution Square, Bucharest, after the overthrow of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. The country's second and last communist leader was overthrown in the uprising, which was also supported by large numbers of the Romanian Army. The revolution saw widespread violence between supporters and opponents of the Ceausescu regime. Ceausescu and his wife Elena were tried and executed by firing squad on Christmas Day.

© Getty

© Alamy



WAR in FOCUS

GARHWALI GRIT

4 August 1915

Four men of the 39th Garhwal Rifles, part of the Garhwal Brigade of the Meerut Division, photographed somewhere in France. The Garhwalis earned a fierce reputation during the First World War, with two riflemen earning the Victoria Cross. After suffering heavy casualties on the Western Front, the regiment was removed from the front to coalesce, before being transferred to Mesopotamia. After the war two additional battalions were added to the regiment, which was renamed 39th Royal Garhwal Rifles.

TIMELINE OF...

SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Spain tears itself apart in a grim prelude to WWII as the Second Spanish Republic is defeated and Francisco Franco becomes a fascist dictator for decades

NATIONALISTS VS REPUBLICANS

The Second Spanish Republic is formed in 1931 when a Republican provisional government and constitution are established. King Alfonso XIII of Spain abdicates but the new republic is intensely opposed by right-wing Nationalist political groups.

1931-39

16 February 1936

July 1936

1936-39

GENERAL ELECTION OF 1936

A left-wing coalition of Republican parties known as the Popular Front narrowly wins a Spanish general election. The result is hotly contested by Nationalist groups, including aspects of the Spanish military that fear that a liberal government will lead to a Marxist revolution.

A man carries a bundle of election material to Madrid's General Post Office for distribution to towns and villages throughout Spain

COUP OF JULY 1936

A Nationalist and military coup is launched to overthrow the Second Spanish Republic. It begins in Spanish Morocco, with garrisons rising up on the mainland. Nationalist forces overrun much of Republican-controlled Spain and civil war breaks out.

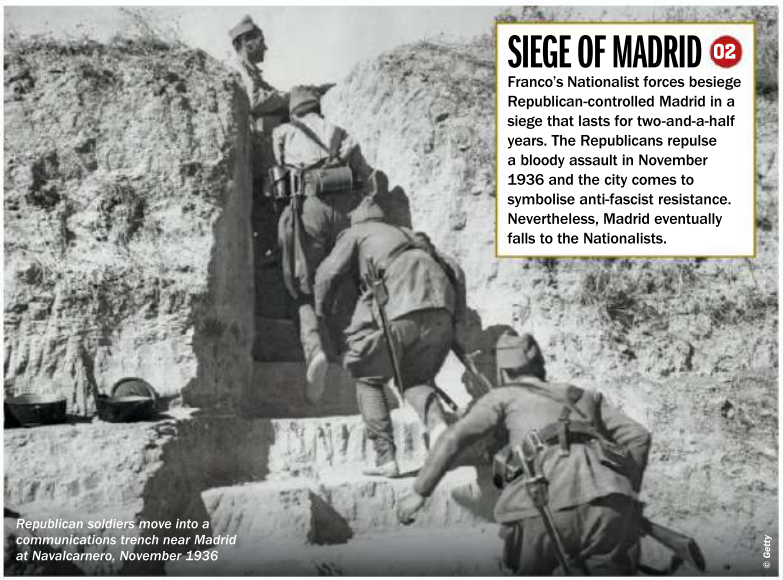
A group of fighters on the side of the government pictured in the Basque border town of Irun

FOREIGN SUPPORT

Both the Republicans and Nationalists receive military assistance. The Nationalists are substantially supported by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and corporatist Portugal. The Republicans are bolstered by tens of thousands of foreign volunteers known as the International Brigades.

A propaganda poster depicting the standards of the Condor Legion – the military personnel from Nazi Germany who fight alongside the Nationalists

A street demonstration in support of the Second Spanish Republic, 1931



Republican soldiers move into a communications trench near Madrid at Navalcarnero, November 1936

SIEGE OF MADRID 02

Franco's Nationalist forces besiege Republican-controlled Madrid in a siege that lasts for two-and-a-half years. The Republicans repulse a bloody assault in November 1936 and the city comes to symbolise anti-fascist resistance. Nevertheless, Madrid eventually falls to the Nationalists.

BATTLE OF GUADALAJARA 03

The Republicans and International Brigades defeat an Italian-led force during a Nationalist attempt to encircle besieged Madrid. Italian offensives are repeatedly halted, with the Republican victory doing much to bolster anti-Nationalist morale.

Two exhausted Italian solders wear caps and scarves under their uniforms to ward off the cold weather at Guadalajara

21 July – 27 September 1936 | 8 November 1936 – 28 March 1939 | 6-27 February 1937 | 8-23 March 1937

General Francisco Franco (right) pictured with Colonel Moscardo, the Nationalist commander of the Alcázar, after the relief of the siege

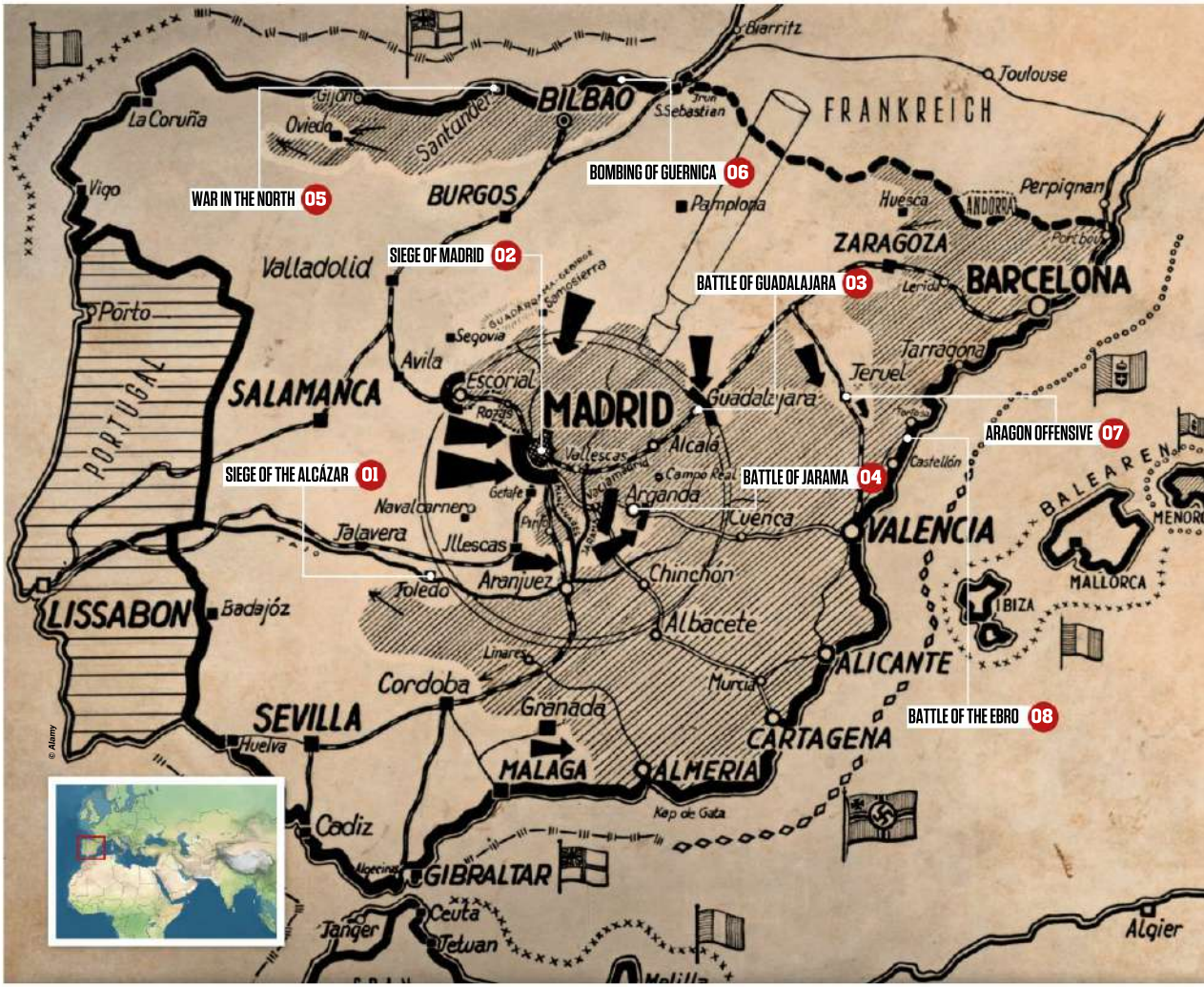
SIEGE OF THE ALCÁZAR 01

Republican militias besiege pro-Nationalist Toledo for several months. The city is symbolic for the Nationalists because the Alcázar castle is the former residence of Spanish monarchs. Nationalist General Francisco Franco relieves the siege with his Army of Africa from Morocco.

BATTLE OF JARAMA 04

Nationalists attempt to dislodge Republican lines east of Madrid by cutting off the highway to Valencia. Fierce fighting occurs in a battle that turns into a stalemate, with tens of thousands of casualties on both sides.

Tanks of the International Brigades prepare to attack the Nationalists



31 March – 21 October 1937

WAR IN THE NORTH 05

Nationalists defeat the Republicans in northern Spain and drive them out of the region. The Republicans suffer heavy defeats, particularly at Santander where 60,000 of their soldiers are captured.

© Getty

Italian Fiat CR.32 biplane fighter aircraft fly over Santander during the summer of 1937

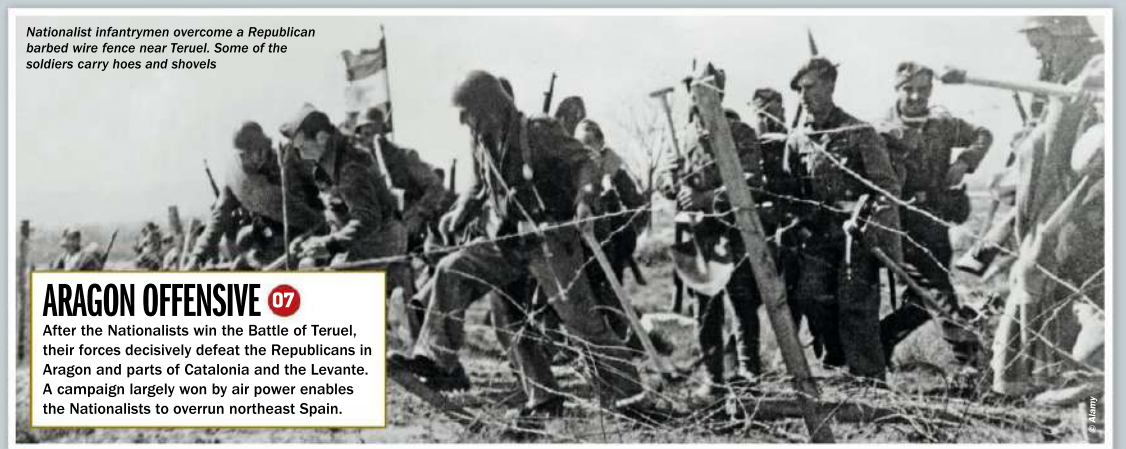
26 April 1937

BOMBING OF GUERNICA 06

Nazi and Italian aircraft drop over 45,000kg of explosives onto the Basque town of Guernica. Hundreds of people are killed in what is considered the first deliberate aerial attack against civilians in military history.

© Getty

The devastation inflicted on Guernica inspires Pablo Picasso to create one of the most powerful anti-war paintings in art history



Nationalist infantrymen overcome a Republican barbed wire fence near Teruel. Some of the soldiers carry hoes and shovels

ARAGON OFFENSIVE 07

After the Nationalists win the Battle of Teruel, their forces decisively defeat the Republicans in Aragon and parts of Catalonia and the Levante. A campaign largely won by air power enables the Nationalists to overrun northeast Spain.

FINAL OFFENSIVE

The Nationalists advance into the remaining Republican territory and capture Madrid on 28 March 1939. Franco proclaims victory when the last Republican forces surrender on 1 April and he rules Spain as a dictator until his death in 1975. The civil war has killed approximately 500,000 people.

Nationalist forces parade in front of Franco in Madrid, 19 May 1939

7 March – 19 April 1938

25 July – 16 November 1938

26 March – 1 April 1939

1936-45

BATTLE OF THE EBRO 08

The longest and largest battle of the war takes place in two areas along the River Ebro in Catalonia. Both sides suffer thousands of casualties and although the Republicans temporarily halt the Nationalist capture of Valencia, they fail to prevent the general advance of Franco's forces.

Republican soldiers cross the River Ebro during the battle

WHITE TERROR

Hundreds of thousands of people are killed by Nationalists who deem them to be enemies of the new Francoist regime. This includes not just Republicans but also diverse groups such as Protestants, intellectuals, homosexuals and Jews.

The controversial Valley of the Fallen monument contains the remains of 40,000 people killed during the Spanish Civil War, including Franco, who was buried there until his exhumation in 2019

LEADERS & COMMANDERS

From ruthless generals to professors turned prime ministers, the war saw many influential figures

JUAN NEGRÍN

THE PRIME MINISTER WHO OVERSAW THE FINAL DAYS OF THE REPUBLIC 1892 - 1956

A professor of psychology, Juan Negrín took over as prime minister of the Republic on 18 May 1937. Previously he had served in Largo Caballero's government under the presidency of Manuel Azaña, but strongly resisted his predecessor's policies. He spent his final years in exile in both England and France, and would die in the latter in 1956. Increasingly his weakening government came to rely on the Soviet Union for support, a factor for which Negrín found himself continuously criticised, and he was often referred to as nothing but a puppet. During his career as minister of finance he had controversially transferred all of Spain's gold reserves to the USSR in return for weapons, a decision which some argued placed him directly under Stalin's control.

Juan Negrin, the professor of psychology who became the Republic's last prime minister

GENERAL FRANCISCO FRANCO

LEADER OF THE NATIONALIST FORCES, HIS EVENTUAL VICTORY SAW HIM INSTALLED AS HEAD OF THE NEW REGIME 1892 - 1975

Francisco Franco was born in 1892, to a troubled family. His mother was a pious Roman Catholic, while his father was an eccentric who would eventually abandon them. Despite wanting a career in the navy, cutbacks meant that at age 14 Franco enrolled in the Toledo Military Academy instead, where the young man excelled. At the age of 19 he volunteered for active duty against the Moroccan rebels and by 1915 Franco had become the youngest captain in the Spanish army. It was due to his role in the rebels' eventual defeat that at age 33 he was promoted to brigadier general. After the fall of the monarchy, Franco found himself placed on the inactive list but was soon named chief of the Spanish Army's General Staff when conservative forces took over in 1935.

After the Popular Front was victorious in the 1936 elections, yet was unable to halt social and economic collapse, Franco appealed for a declaration of emergency but was removed from his post and sent to the Canary Islands. Despite being initially sceptical of a military conspiracy, on 18 July 1938 Franco broadcast a message from the Canary Islands calling for all army officers to join a rebellion against the Republic of Spain. The next day a secret flight took Franco to Morocco, from where he led his forces back into Spain and was chosen as the leader of the Nationalist government.

After the death of José Sanjurjo, Franco took over command of the Nationalist forces during the civil war, carrying out a strategy that slowly but steadily wrested territory from the Republican government. Support from Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany helped and on 1 April 1939 his forces were victorious. His regime following the war was authoritarian and essentially a military dictatorship.

General Francisco Franco led the Nationalist troops to victory in the Spanish Civil War

JOSÉ SANJURJO

A HERO TO MANY, HE DIED DAYS BEFORE TAKING CONTROL 1872 – 1936

José Sanjurjo would have been leader of the military rebellion were it not for his untimely death

A Spanish general who had gained notoriety during the Moroccan wars, Sanjurjo led a coup against the Republic in 1932 but this was defeated and he was forced into exile. He was one of the four commanders, alongside Francisco Franco, Emilio Mola and Gonzalo Queipo de Llano who began the revolt in Morocco which would initiate the Spanish Civil War. It was suspected that it would be Sanjurjo who would be the leader of the new rebellion and on 19 July 1946 he boarded a small plane which would take him from exile in Lisbon to Madrid. However, possibly due to overloading, the plane was unable to gain altitude during takeoff and collided with some trees, killing Sanjurjo.

Manuel Azaña was a journalist, author and playwright turned politician who was the last president of the Republic

MANUEL AZAÑA

THE LAST PRESIDENT OF SPAIN'S DOOMED REPUBLIC 1880 – 1940

The president of the Second Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War, Manuel Azaña was a journalist, author and playwright turned politician. In 1931 he became prime minister and attempted to introduce a number of reforms, which he was only able to get through following a failed coup before he was ousted from power in the general election of 1933. However, in 1936 Azaña was instrumental in establishing the Popular Front coalition of a number of leftist groups in Spain.

The Popular Front won the general election and introduced a number of reforms that penalised the aristocracy. In May of that year, Azaña became president, shortly before war broke out. He attempted to resign but was persuaded to stay on, though by the end of the war became purely a figurehead. Following the fall of Barcelona, Azaña relocated close to the French border and on 5 February he and his government retreated, officially going into exile and resigning after British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain officially recognised the Franco regime.

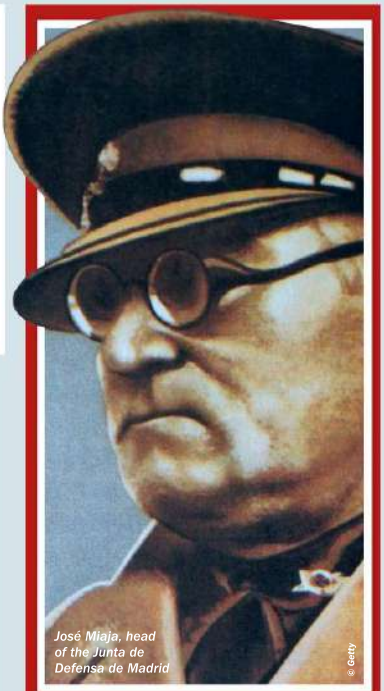
JUAN YAGUE

KNOWN AS THE BUTCHER OF BADAJOZ, HE OVERSAW A MASSACRE OF 4,000 1891 – 1952

A fellow cadet of Francisco Franco at the Toledo Military Academy, Juan Yague also served alongside Franco in Africa where he excelled himself and was decorated on several occasions. Born in San Leonardo de Yague, he was the son of a doctor who proved himself a capable military leader.

During the war Yague was known for his temper and fell out bitterly with Franco on several occasions, most notably over the Generalissimo's decision in 1936 to divert his forces to Toledo rather than take Madrid. Yague was put in charge of a column of the elite Moroccan Army Corps, or the Army of Africa, where his bloodthirsty reputation was cemented. Yague became known as the Butcher of Badajoz after ordering the massacre of 4,000 military and civilian supporters of the Republic.

Juan Yague was called the Butcher of Badajoz after a brutal massacre of Republican supporters



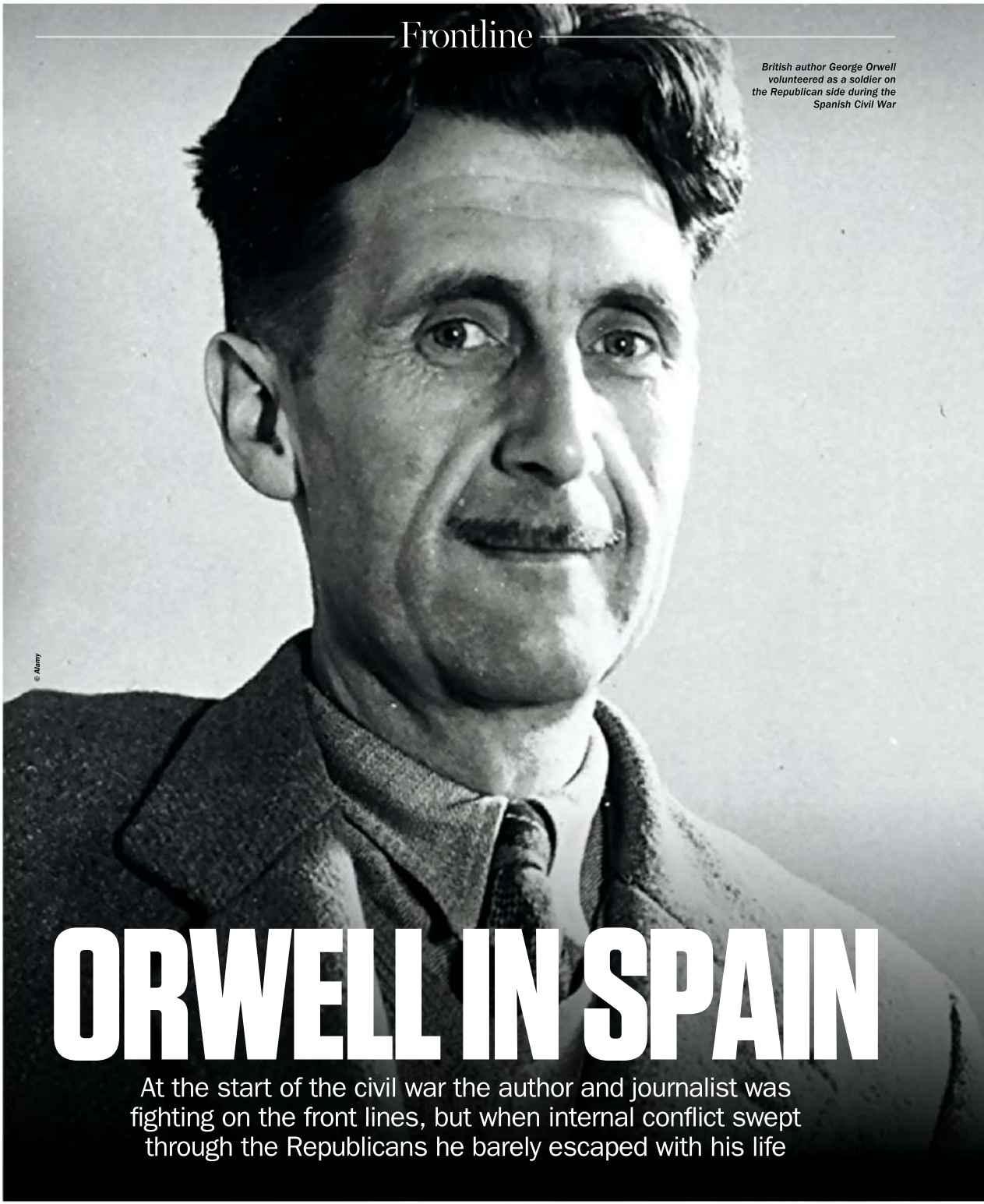
José Miaja, head of the Junta de Defensa de Madrid

JOSÉ MIAJA

THE REPUBLICAN GENERAL WHO OVERSAW THE DEFENCE OF MADRID 1878 – 1958

José Miaja was a general in the Spanish army who, upon the outbreak of civil war, remained loyal to the Republic. He served as minister of war, though this was a short-lived appointment. Miaja was put in charge of the Junta de Defensa (Defence Council) of Madrid during the final Nationalist assault on the city, and under his control it ran the defence of the city from November 1936 until April 1937, when the council was dissolved and a new one set up. During his period in charge of the city's defence he was determined to be seen throughout Madrid to keep the people's morale high, and he was popular among the civilians as a result. Following this position he would become commander of the Central Region Army Group. At the end of the civil war Miaja was able to escape into exile and settled in Mexico, where he died aged 79.

"UNDER MIAJA'S CONTROL THE JUNTA DE DEFENSA RAN THE DEFENCE OF THE CITY FROM NOVEMBER 1936 UNTIL APRIL 1937"



British author George Orwell volunteered as a soldier on the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War

© Alamy

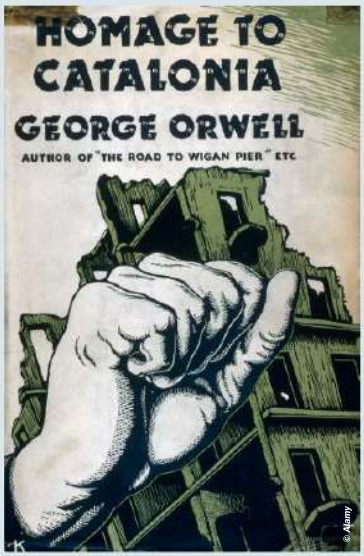
ORWELL IN SPAIN

At the start of the civil war the author and journalist was fighting on the front lines, but when internal conflict swept through the Republicans he barely escaped with his life

In 1936, Eric Arthur Blair (better known by his pen name George Orwell) was 33 years old and an established journalist and author, with four books already published. However, after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Orwell decided to join the Republican cause, arriving in Barcelona on 26 December 1936, five months after Francisco Franco launched his military uprising. In the same year, some 35,000 volunteers from 80 countries flocked to Spain to assist the Republican forces in the fight against fascism. The Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) had been formed during the Second Republic and it was this group who organised the militia that Orwell joined. Quite how Orwell found himself in a militia is another story.

Originally he had intended to join the International Brigades, but after a tense meeting he found himself rejected by Harry Pollitt (who in his review of *The Road to Wigan Pier* would describe Orwell as "a delusioned little middle class boy"). It's not clear why Pollitt refused Orwell, though Orwell himself believed Pollitt found him "politically unreliable". Instead Orwell sought the assistance of the Independent Labour Party, who arranged the means for him to travel to Spain, purportedly to write newspaper articles. But upon arriving Orwell, as he later wrote, "joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do".

By January 1937 he had been given the rank of corporal and that same month he saw action, being sent to join the offensive at Aragón – the first major Republican attack. Many of the recruits he was fighting alongside were young and undisciplined and Orwell's previous training in the Indian Imperial Police gave him the necessary



***Above:** The first edition of Homage to Catalonia, Orwell's memoir of his time in Spain*

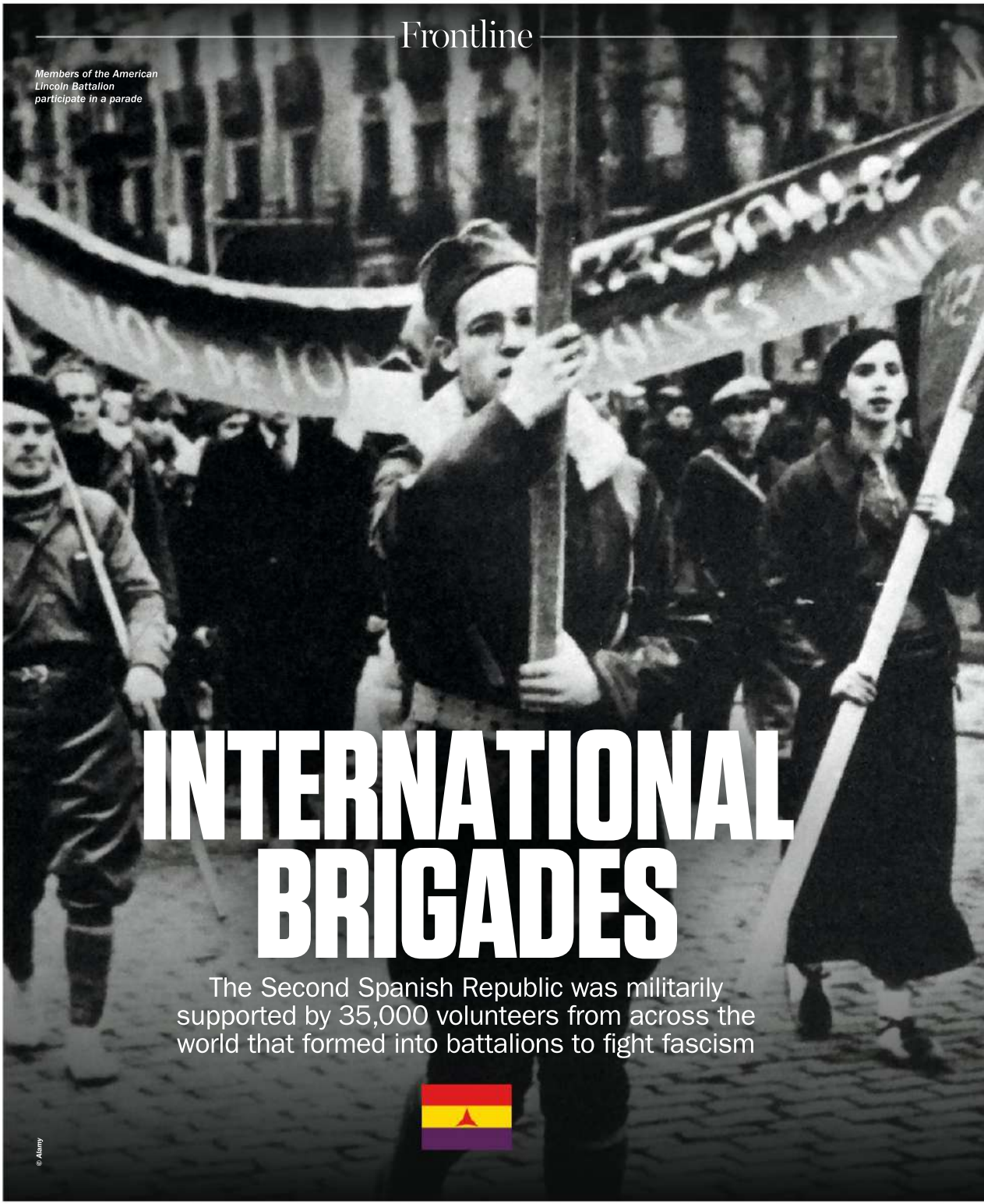
experience to become a sort of leader to the men. He would drill the troops at the Barcelona barracks square and his large stature allowed him to drink them under the table during the evenings. However, he soon left his Catalan unit to join a British volunteer contingent, seeing real action as he assisted in creating a diversion for a larger operation further down the lines.

Orwell's connection with the POUM eventually became a source of danger to the young writer. The group was essentially anti-Stalinist and its members found themselves targeted following the 1937 riots where revolutionary movements in Catalonia fought with Republican Police. At this point the government of Juan Negrin was dependent on the support of the Soviet Union and targeted any organisations which they felt were under the influence of Leon Trotsky. The Republic placed the leaders of POUM on trial and the leader, Andreu Nin, was sent to a camp where he was tortured and killed under the supervision of the NKVD. It would not be long before Orwell himself would face the wrath of Moscow. However, any fears of repercussions from the Republic were soon to be the least of his worries when, on 20 May, Orwell was shot through the throat and nearly killed.

He reunited with his wife and fled first to France and from there to England. On 13 July a secret police file named the couple as confirmed communists. Orwell later learned that a 22-year-old journalist called Bob Smillie, who he had served alongside, had died in prison under suspicious circumstances.

It was in 1938, as the Spanish Civil War still raged, that Orwell's memoir of his time as a volunteer soldier, *Homage to Catalonia*, was published. On its initial release it sold a mere 683 copies in the first six months of publication. However, in successive decades the book has become one of the defining narratives of the conflict alongside Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. Lionel Trilling, the respected American literary critic and author of the essay *George Orwell and the Politics of Truth*, wrote that *Homage to Catalonia* "is one of the most important historical documents of our time… a testimony to the nature of modern political life… a demonstration on the part of the author of one of the right ways of confronting that life".

Orwell, at the very back of the unit, towering over his fellow soldiers



Members of the American Lincoln Battalion participate in a parade

INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES

The Second Spanish Republic was militarily supported by 35,000 volunteers from across the world that formed into battalions to fight fascism

© Alamy

Although it was an internal conflict, the Spanish Civil War was a cauldron for global politics. Split down highly complex ideological lines, the war was never a straightforward clash between Franco's right-wing Nationalists and the left-wing government of the Second Spanish Republic. The tense politics of the 1930s meant that the Nationalists received substantial military support from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Official foreign support for the Republic was far more subdued but the state was bolstered by the informal assistance of often inexperienced volunteers: the International Brigades.

Ragtag battalions

From September 1936, the Soviet-controlled Communist International (Comintern) set up a system of recruiting foreign volunteers to fight for the Republic. While the Soviet Union did not fully commit to supporting the Republicans, what became known as the International Brigades took on a life of their own. Volunteers were known as 'brigaders' and came from dozens of countries. The largest foreign group were French but there were substantial numbers from the United States, Britain, Poland, Germany and Italy. Some of the smaller contingents came from as far afield as China and South America, and the brigaders' political leanings were just as varied.

Approximately half were communists but they fought alongside liberal-minded democrats, socialists and anarchists. One in ten were also Jewish, with anti-fascism loosely uniting these different political groups. Formed into seven brigades under Comintern commanders, the volunteers were divided into battalions based on nationality. For example, there was the French-Belgian Commune de Paris Battalion, the Lincoln Battalion for Americans, Mickiewicz Battalion for Poles and the British Battalion for volunteers from the UK, Irish Free State and Commonwealth.

Although they were frequently badly equipped and given little training, the brigaders were often able to fight effectively. Deployed as shock troops, they fought in important engagements such as the Siege of Madrid and the Battles of Jarama and Guadalajara. They were often highly regarded for their determination and courage, but brigaders were also known for desertion. Nevertheless, many fought at Guadalajara in March 1937, which was arguably the Republicans' greatest victory.

The Republican force of 20,000 soldiers fought against 45,000 Italian and colonial Moroccan troops at Guadalajara and managed to win a strategic victory. The Italians lost thousands of men and their defeat prevented the Nationalist encirclement of Madrid. Aiding the Republicans in this success was XII International 'Garibaldi' Brigade, which mostly consisted of Italian volunteers. In this regard, the battle was a civil war engagement of a different kind, where Italian anti-fascists fought their own countrymen who had been deployed to Spain by Benito Mussolini.

As the war progressed, heavy casualties took a toll on the International Brigades: 7,000 were killed (including one-fifth of the British volunteers) and their ranks were slowly replaced with Spanish communists. Internal political divisions also hampered their cause. Some foreign volunteers chose not to serve with the International Brigades and instead joined other anti-fascist militia groups such as the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) and CNT-FAI. The POUM's ideology was Trotskyist and had international links with the British Independent Labour Party, while the CNT-FAI were anarchists. Because the International Brigades had links to the Soviet Union through the Comintern, separate anti-fascist militias like the POUM were repressed by Stalinists.

This high level of political division greatly hindered the military struggle against the Nationalists and Franco's forces were able to make significant gains. 1938 was a turning point, with Franco winning decisive victories at the Battles of Teruel and the Ebro. The International Brigades continued to fight despite a severe lack of resources but they were disbanded by the Republican Prime Minister Juan Negrín on 21 September 1938. Negrín believed that disbanding the brigades would compel Italian and German forces to withdraw their own troops from Spain under international pressure, but this was a false assumption.

Heroes and villains

Surviving brigaders continued to make an impact in the fight against fascism during WWII. The British Battalion's commander, Tom Wintringham, was a keen exponent of the UK's Home Guard and trained volunteers in street fighting and guerrilla warfare. Italian brigaders often led partisan forces in Italy with one of them, Aldo Lampredi, being one of the executioners of Mussolini in April 1945.

Former communist brigaders also played significant roles in the post-war Eastern Bloc. Ferenc Münnich and Mehmet Shehu became prime ministers of Hungary and Albania, while others dominated the armed ministries of East Germany. Perhaps the most notorious brigader was Erich Mielke who ran the Stasi during 1957-89. Known as the 'master of fear' for his state surveillance, Mielke was eventually jailed for murder in 1993.

The actions of former brigaders who served communist tyranny after fighting fascism complicated the legacy of the International Brigades. However, most regard the foreign volunteers as heroic defenders of freedom, with Spaniards being particularly grateful. Their idealistic spirit endures with the Spanish government even toying with the idea of offering citizenship to the descendants of volunteers in September 2020. Although the idea was shelved, Spain's Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias was moved to write: "It is about time we said to those heroes and heroines of democracy: thank you for coming."

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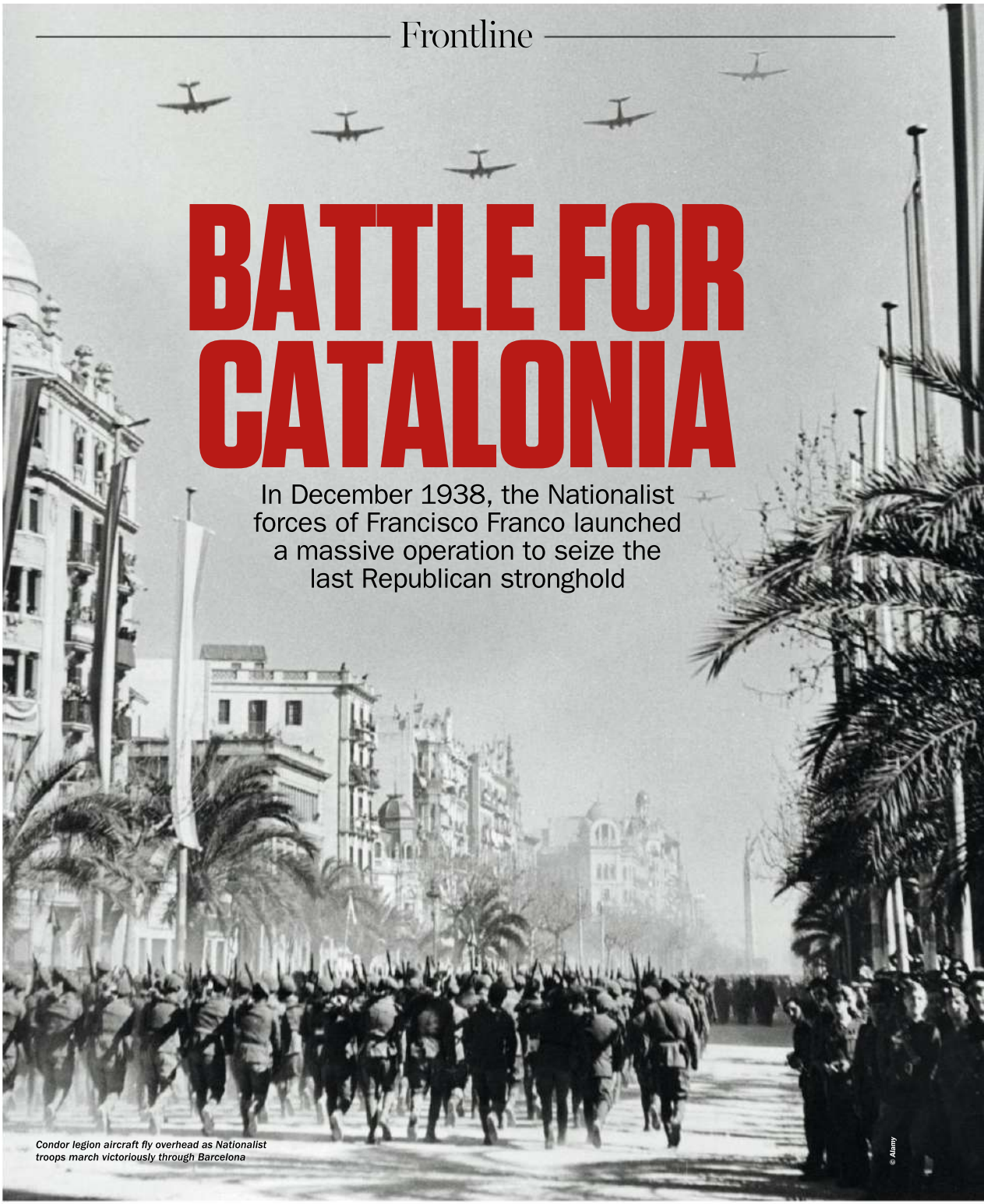
***Left:** A Republican propaganda poster, reading "United with the Spanish, we fight the Invader"*

An English unit of the International Brigades named after the trade unionist Tom Mann

BATTLE FOR CATALONIA

In December 1938, the Nationalist forces of Francisco Franco launched a massive operation to seize the last Republican stronghold



Condor legion aircraft fly overhead as Nationalist troops march victoriously through Barcelona

© Alamy

In July 1938, Spain's Republican forces launched an attack across the Ebro River, ending in defeat and heavy losses. Following the battle, Prime Minister Juan Negrin repatriated all members of the International Brigades, while the main force of the Republican Army was all but destroyed. The Republicans retreated into Catalonia and the cities of Barcelona and Madrid.

The Nationalist rebels had attempted to take Barcelona as early as 1936 in a swift, sharp attack. On 19 July, street fighting broke out as militias, civil troops and a handful of soldiers loyal to the Republic defended the city. The city fell under the control of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour) – a trade union movement – and remained a Republican stronghold. By June 1937, though the Nationalist forces had made great gains across the peninsula, both Madrid and Barcelona remained defiant and the latter was now the location of Juan Negrin's government. For the next two years Barcelona endured 194 airborne attacks, mainly from Germany's Condor Legion.

The battle begins

Scheduled to commence on 10 December 1938, the Catalonia offensive was delayed due to poor weather. Ignoring a call for a Christmas truce from the Vatican, Nationalist chiefs moved 34,000 troops, 300 tanks, 500 aircraft and 1,400 guns to take the region. The Navarre Corps (an elite unit similar to the Army of Africa) and Italian units, supported by the Condor Legion (military and aerial support provided by Nazi Germany), were able to breach the line. However, the other fronts found themselves blocked as the Republican 26th Division managed to keep both the forces of Muñoz Grandes and Garcia Valiño at bay. It was not until 3 January, when Nationalist forces reached both the Borjas Blancas-Montblanc road as well as the town of Artesa, that progress began to be made. By 15 January 1939, the Nationalist forces had pushed through and taken Tarragona, only a few kilometres outside of Barcelona.

On 22 January, the order was given for the hospitals of Barcelona to be evacuated, as well as all health staff and officials. In the days prior the surrounding smaller hospitals had been similarly evacuated and it became clear that the situation was grave as numerous civilians were escorted out of the city. During this time Nationalist forces continued to carry out vast bombing campaigns against Barcelona. As the Nationalist troops drew nearer there was little fighting and two days later the government of Juan Negrin moved to Gerona. With the government gone there was little sense of resistance among those who remained and few serious attempts at defence. At midday on 25 January, the occupation of the city began. There was little fighting – most of the officials had left with Negrin a day prior – and many offices and buildings of importance were taken without a single shot being fired. Over the following five days there was looting and a number of killings.

The aftermath

Following the fall of Barcelona, some 500,000 Republican refugees, including soldiers, fled across the Pyrenees and into an ill-prepared France. Catalonia was now in disarray and the minister of the interior was left to personally attempt to regulate traffic into France. Those fleeing were subject to numerous aerial attacks, despite Franco's orders to the contrary.

Those who did manage to escape to France were placed in internment camps, the conditions of which were extremely poor. Despite still holding Madrid, with the military and industrial infrastructure of Catalonia gone the situation for the Republican Army was hopeless. Juan Negrin was deposed in a military coup and fled to France. For several years he would attempt to set up a government in exile, but with no success. Madrid would finally fall on 28 March 1939, marking the end of the Civil War. Soon after Franco declared his government, marking the beginning of his 36-year dictatorship.

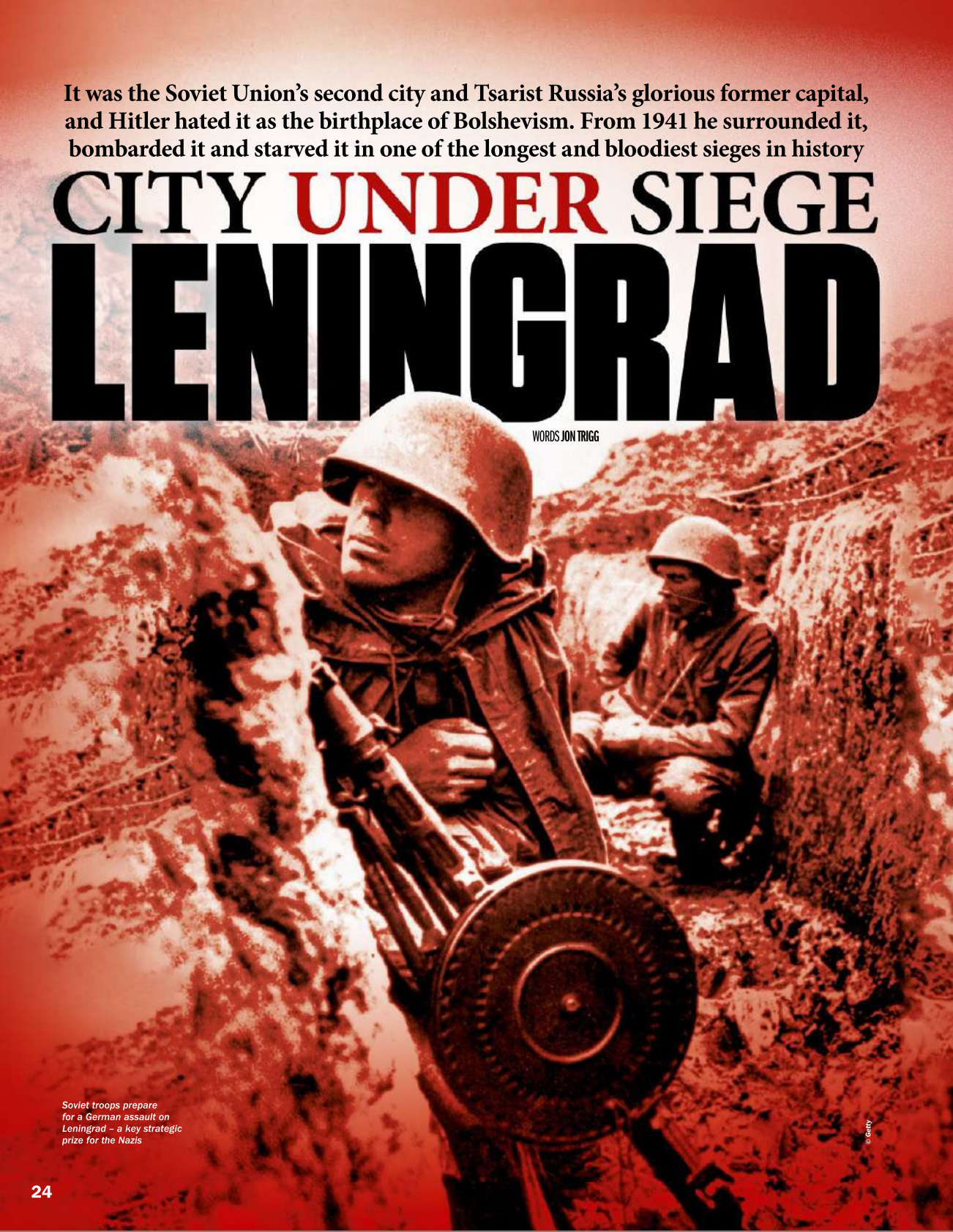
Catalan refugees in France, having fled the fall of Barcelona

© Getty

It was the Soviet Union's second city and Tsarist Russia's glorious former capital, and Hitler hated it as the birthplace of Bolshevism. From 1941 he surrounded it, bombarded it and starved it in one of the longest and bloodiest sieges in history

CITY UNDER SIEGE
LENINGRAD

WORDS JON TRIGG



Soviet troops prepare for a German assault on Leningrad – a key strategic prize for the Nazis

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Armed civilian volunteers from Leningrad's famous Kirov factory march to the front as the Germans approach

© Getty

© Alamy

Leningrad's citizens – most of them women – use shovels and picks to construct defences before the Germans attack

German shells land on the Nevsky Prospekt, killing civilians indiscriminately

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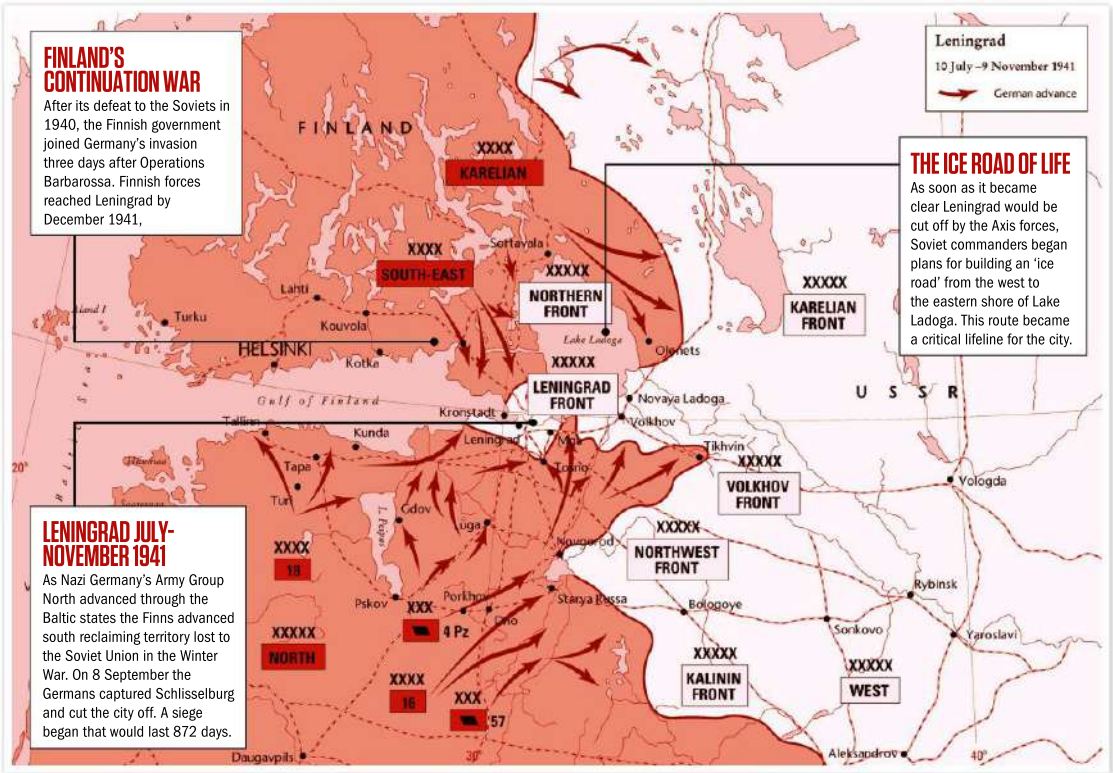
On 22 June 1941, Sepp de Giampietro was waiting in the darkness of an East Prussian forest: "We checked our weapons and ammunition, one last warm meal was being dished out… we ate it without really tasting it, our throats were so tight… then all of a sudden fire erupted everywhere… the clock read 0305hrs." Barbarossa – the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union – had begun.

In the south the Germans aimed to capture Ukraine – the breadbasket of the Soviet Union – in the centre the targets were Belarus and then Moscow, and it was Army Group North's objective to take Leningrad. The man tasked with capturing the city was a devout Bavarian Catholic, Wilhelm von Leeb, and to do it he commanded the infantrymen of 16th and 18th Armies and the Panzers of Erich Hoepner's Panzergruppe 4. Charging forward at breathtaking pace, the Panzers surged through the Soviet-occupied Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. They were helped at every turn by de Giampietro and his fellow Brandenburger commandos, who would don Red Army uniforms to hoodwink the Soviets and seize key bridges intact for the armour to drive over. In a little over a fortnight the Germans had breached the Stalin Line fortifications at Pskov, and a week later they vaulted over the River Luga to establish a bridgehead. Astonishingly, the Germans had advanced nearly 1,000km since the start of the invasion and Leningrad was just 97km away.

"AFTER THE DEFEAT OF SOVIET RUSSIA THERE WILL NOT BE THE SLIGHTEST REASON FOR THE FUTURE EXISTENCE OF THIS LARGE CITY"

With panic in the air the Communist authorities acted. Over half-a-million of Leningrad's almost four million civilian inhabitants – men, women and children – were marched out of the city to build defensive rings around it. In an astonishing feat of mass labour they dug nearly 1,000km of earthworks and 640km of anti-tank ditches, laid almost as much barbed wire and built 5,000 pillboxes.

On Monday 8 September the Germans captured Schlisselburg – Leningrad was now cut off. With the Panzers diverted south to



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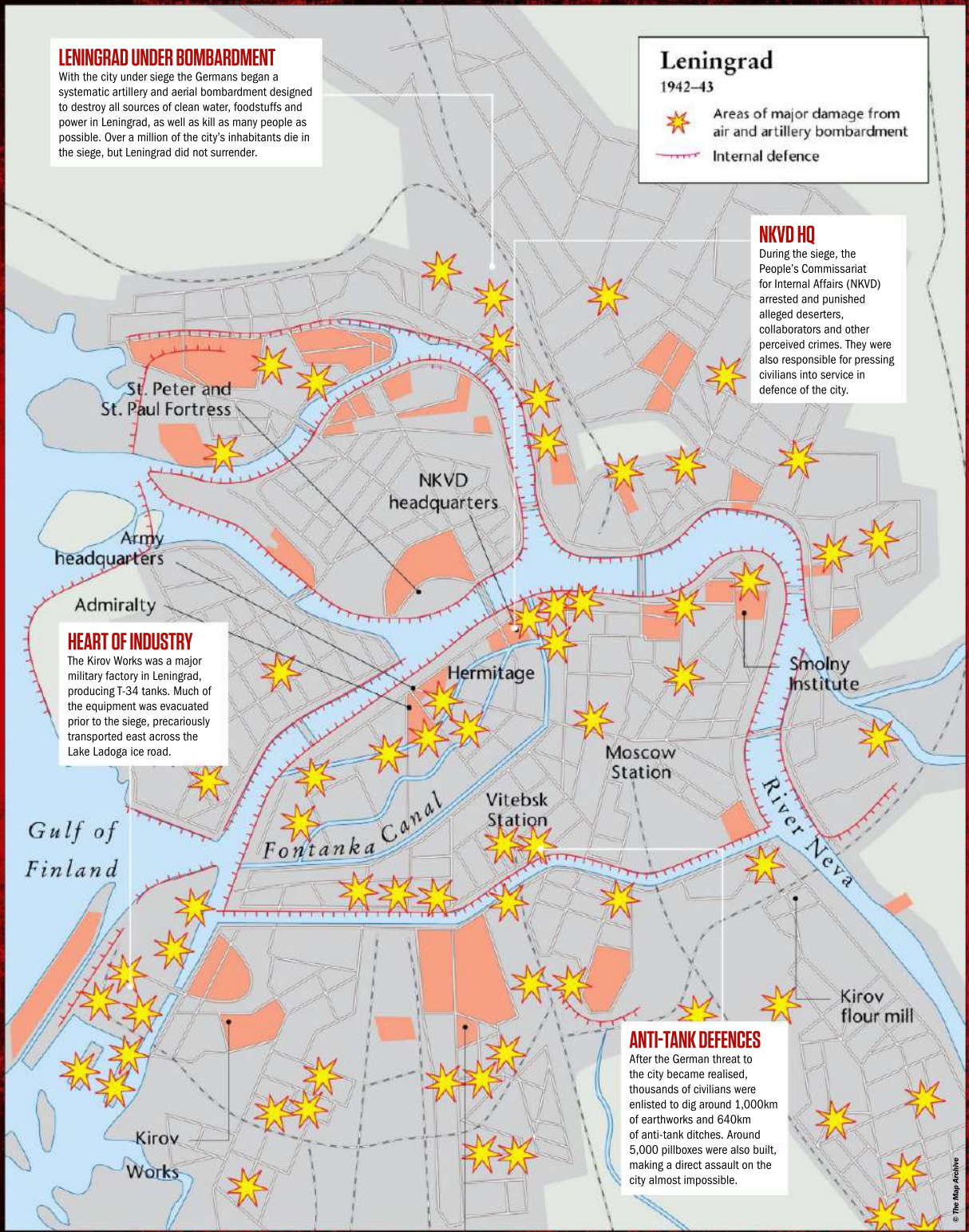
support the drive on Moscow, Dr Werner Koeppen – a top Nazi official – wrote that: "Leningrad is to be shut in, shot to pieces, and starved out." That same Monday, the Luftwaffe bombed the warehouse district of Badaev, destroying the city's food reserves – molten sugar poured into the river like lava.

Three days later General Georgi Zhukov flew into the city to take charge, and the surrounding Germans began to build a warren of trenches, bunkers and observation posts as they settled down to a siege in First World War conditions. Inside the city Vera Inber tried to use her phone only for the operator to tell her: "The telephone is disconnected until the end of the war." At the same time the daily bread ration was reduced to 500 grams a day for factory workers, 300 for office staff and 250 for dependents. Elena Skrjabina, a young mother, confided to her diary that: "Life had been reduced to one thing – the hunt for food."

The shelling began in earnest on 17 September with an opening barrage that lasted 18 hours and 33 minutes. From then onwards it settled into a routine: 8am to 9am, then 11am to 12 noon, then from 5pm to 6pm, and from 8pm to 10pm. A German POW later testified at the Nuremberg tribunal: "This way the shelling would kill as many people as possible." The Luftwaffe took a hand as well with frequent bombing raids. One such attack wrecked 74 Marat Street. "Vera Potekhina was found under the wreckage," said a witness. "Screaming for help and her father – [who was] at the scene

© Alamy

A German 17cm Kanone 18 heavy gun bombards Leningrad during the winter of 1941-42. Its standard shell weighed 68kg and had a range of some 27km



LENINGRAD UNDER BOMBARDMENT

With the city under siege the Germans began a systematic artillery and aerial bombardment designed to destroy all sources of clean water, foodstuffs and power in Leningrad, as well as kill as many people as possible. Over a million of the city's inhabitants die in the siege, but Leningrad did not surrender.

NKVD HQ

During the siege, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) arrested and punished alleged deserters, collaborators and other perceived crimes. They were also responsible for pressing civilians into service in defence of the city.

HEART OF INDUSTRY

The Kirov Works was a major military factory in Leningrad, producing T-34 tanks. Much of the equipment was evacuated prior to the siege, precariously transported east across the Lake Ladoga ice road.

ANTI-TANK DEFENCES

After the German threat to the city became realised, thousands of civilians were enlisted to dig around 1,000km of earthworks and 640km of anti-tank ditches. Around 5,000 pillboxes were also built, making a direct assault on the city almost impossible.

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with the rescue team – [they] began frantically pulling away the debris… but when the last timbers were pulled away, the girl had died." Hitler, reconciled to a siege, issued a general order on 22 September stating: "After the defeat of Soviet Russia there will not be the slightest reason for the future existence of this large city," and that through blockade and bombardment it'd be "razed to the ground".

Winter began to set in and the thermometer plummeted to -30°C, as Stephan Kuznetsov recorded on 2 November: "The temperature is really dropping now and hunger is a constant presence among us." By then the city's centrally baked bread contained cottonseed oil cake previously used as cattle feed, mouldy grain retrieved from a ship sunk in Lake Ladoga and floor sweepings. Elena Kochina described how "the bread was now sticky and damp". With so little food available, people had to improvise. The city's dogs and cats soon all went into the pot, to be followed by joiner's glue scraped from furniture as it was based on animal proteins. Faina Prusova remembered that "on the advice of one elderly woman I boiled the wallpaper… then I tried boiling a leather belt". By then the daily bread ration had dropped to half what it had been in September.

As the snow on the ground thickened heading towards Christmas, the meagre bread ration was cut once again, this time to just 250 grams for factory workers and 125 grams for everyone else – the equivalent of just three slices of a medium-sized loaf. A lecture given at the time described how "the outward manifestation of starvation is seen in swelling… the skin is dry, deprived of sweat and fat; the specific facial expression is apathy".

By January of the new year 17-year-old Vasily Vladimirov was writing in his diary that: "The death toll has reached 20,000 a day. Everywhere in the streets you see people carrying dead bodies." Life inside the besieged city became primal, with one inhabitant stating: "Some seek to save their lives at any price: they steal ration cards, tear bread out of the hands of passers-by… they roam the streets, mad from hunger and the fear of death." In total desperation some turned to cannibalism: "One woman, utterly worn out… said that when her husband fainted through exhaustion and lack of food, she hacked off part of his leg to make soup for her and her children. Another said she cut off part of a dead body lying in the street." These women were caught and executed by the authorities. Gangs formed and preyed upon people walking alone at night, parents ate their children and children waited for their parents

Two women hack up a horse killed by a German bombardment for its meat

CANNIBALS OF LENINGRAD

In the most desperate times of the long siege, people were driven to unthinkable acts in order to survive

Alone in her home, 12-year-old Tanya Savicheva scrawled in her diary the words: "The Savichevs are dead. Everyone is dead. Only Tanya is left." The notebook, in blue pencil filled with misspellings, lists each of her family members who she had seen die of starvation.

First her older sister Zhenya, her grandmother Yevdokiya, her brother Leka, and her two uncles, and finally the entry: "Mama on May 13th at 7:30 in the morning, 1942." Tanya was alone, abandoned in a city that had been entirely cut off from the outside world. But she was not alone in writing a diary. Across the city, hundreds of people were chronicling the horrors of one of the deadliest sieges in history – the extent of which would not be revealed until decades later.

In spring 1942, outside Tanya's home the streets were strewn with more victims who had perished as a result of Hitler's determination to starve her city to death. His chilling directive had come on 22 September 1941: "St Petersburg must be erased from the face of the Earth. We have no interest in saving the lives of the civilian population." Nearly a third of the inhabitants would starve to death over the next 872 days.

The three million people trapped in the city were left to survive on almost nothing – just 125 grams of dense sticky black bread made from a mixture of rye and oatmeal, kerosene and unfiltered malt. But the bitter tasting bread offered little nutritional value and did nothing to stop the hunger pains.

Unprepared for the siege, it had taken just 12 weeks for German and Finnish forces to surround the city, destroying hospitals, food stores, roads, schools, power plants and water supplies. Leningraders were forced to forage for anything they could that might offer more life-sustaining calories than the rationed bread alone. People started to eat anything they could stomach: leather belts boiled into jelly, the scrapings from the back of wallpaper, fur coats. Elena Skryabina, a teacher of Russian literature, described in her diary on 3 October 1941: "I visited a lady I know, and she let me try one of her culinary inventions – a jelly made from leather belts. The recipe is: cook belts made from pig leather and prepare a sort of aspic out of it. This nastiness beggars description! A sort of a yellowish colour and a horrible smell. Despite my extreme hunger, I couldn't bring myself to swallow even a spoonful, and gagged."

The city became rife with outbreaks of disease and the increasingly gaunt populace was about to face a gruelling winter that would torment the already weakened city.

(Left to right) Leningrader Sl Petrova in May 1941, May 1942 and October 1942 as she almost starved to death

A cart conveys its cargo of corpses to a makeshift cemetery where the dead lie in the open

People queue to draw water from a hole in the ice during the first winter of the siege

Source: Wiki / PD / Gov

As the temperature dropped below -32°C, people started burning everything they could find to heat their homes, starting with the furniture, then the cherished family books. But some precious notebooks were kept as writing had become an important way of coping for many of the people confined to the city.

As the hunger became more and more intolerable, it wasn't long before birds, rats, and stray dogs and cats started disappearing from the streets. And when this resource ran out, Leningraders traded beloved pets with their neighbours so they were not forced to kill and eat their own. At this point, people started to show symptoms of extreme starvation.

"[They're] horrible, only skeletons, not people," wrote factory worker Ivan Savinkov in his diary. Klavdiya Naumovna, a doctor at a Leningrad hospital, had similar sentiments in his diary, writing: "These aren't people, rather skeletons with dry skin of a horrible colour stretched over them. Their consciousness is muddied, there's a kind of dullness and doltishness about them.

"They lack strength completely. Today I saw a patient like that; he walked to the hospital by himself, but died two hours later."

Bodies piled in the open and corpses were dragged through the streets on sleds to be buried in mass graves. It's no wonder that between the hunger and the heavy artillery bombardment that tensions started to rise. First between neighbours, and then between families, as people were killed for ration cards and others started secretly keeping dead loved ones to claim their rations. These rising tensions didn't go unremarked by the people of the starving city. Arkadii Lepkovich noticed the blockade breaking apart his marriage as he and his wife grew suspicious of one another: "Even relations between mother and child, husband and wife, have been made completely inhuman," he wrote. "The whole city has become this way because the battle for life has brought despair to every living individual."

People were going to increasing lengths to find a way to feed themselves and their families. They became paranoid of one another as rumours began to spread that others were dining on much worse than their beloved pets. Children started disappearing, bodies went missing from the cemetery, corpses on the streets had parts missing. On 13 December 1941, the people's fears were confirmed when the NKVD, Stalin's notorious secret police, filed the first report of the consumption of human flesh. Over the period of the siege 1,207 individuals were convicted for cannibalism.

One account from survivor Galina Yakovleva recalls a strange warm smell coming from a room, a smell that emanated from the flesh of a corpse prepared for food: "In the twilight, there were huge chunks of meat hung from hooks to the ceiling. And one piece was a human hand with long fingers and blue veins…"

The perpetrators of cannibalism in starving Leningrad had not been criminals – only 18 people had previous convictions. Instead, they were people driven to such crimes by starvation and madness, driven by the will to survive and to save their families. The vast majority of those who resorted to cannibalism were eating corpses that had already died, and were unsupported women with young children. But the NKVD reports do detail some gristly occasions where Leningraders killed others in the pursuit of a meal.

One of these reports includes a 42-year-old river port worker and his son who murdered, dismembered and ate their two housemates (in the report named only by their initials, M and I) before distributing the flesh, under the guise of horse meat, to trade for wine and cigarettes. On another occasion, the wife of a Red Army soldier lured a 13-year-old girl into her room and killed her with an axe to feed to her two children aged somewhere between eight and 11 years old.

There were so many reports of desperate, starving people eating corpses that the NKVD started a special unit of police and psychiatrists dedicated to trying to minimise the cannibalism.

Despite these tragedies and crimes that were committed in the name of survival, many citizens still clung to humanity, determined that their suffering would not mean they would lose themselves. After the first devastating winter, in the summer of 1942, people still found ways to stay optimistic, with one diarist Klavdiya Naumovna writing: "The people are clean; they've started to wear nice dresses. The tram is running, shops are opening up bit by bit. There are queues at the perfume shops – there's been a delivery of perfume to Leningrad… I was very happy. I love perfume so! I put some on myself and I feel like I'm not hungry, like I've just returned from a concert or a restaurant."

After the siege ended, the government passed out cabbage and carrot seeds and the people of Leningrad planted every available piece of land with vegetables and people celebrated their victory in the streets.

Cats were introduced into the city again to protect the new small crops from rats. People came together to start to rebuild. Families were reunited with loved ones who were outside the blockade when the circle closed, real bread made from flour returned to the market, and a healthy glow came back to the complexions of the survivors. Life had returned to Leningrad. The diaries and NKVD reports would languish in archives behind the Iron Curtain, for the most part unread until the 21st century.

Pages from the diary of the teenage Tanya Savicheva

Source: Wiki / PD / Gov

The Siege of Leningrad ended in January 1944

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Above, left: *Nurses help an old woman from the wreckage of a bombed house*

Above, middle: *A truck carrying supplies into Leningrad on the famed Road of Life across Lake Ladoga. The driver has his door open in case he has to jump if the truck sinks*

Above, right: *The big clean-up – Leningrad's citizens clear ice and rubble off the city's famous Nevsky Prospekt in spring 1942*

to die, as one survivor recalled: "I watched my mother and father die. I knew perfectly well they were starving, but I wanted their bread ration more than I wanted them to stay alive." This was Leningrad's nadir.

However, the Soviet authorities were also partly to blame for the city's misery. By the beginning of December 1941 Lake Ladoga had frozen and the Soviets built an ice road across it – the so-called 'Road of Life'. Despite Luftwaffe bombing attacks and the treacherous nature of the crossing, by the end of the year over 4,000 trucks were taking 700 tons of food and supplies into the city every day and were available to evacuate citizens out. By 10 February that daily amount had grown to 3,000 tons, allowing the authorities to actually increase the bread ration back up to its September levels of 500 grams for factory workers. But in reality most citizens weren't getting anything like this allowance as corruption became endemic, with Party officials plundering the convoys for their own benefit. Stalin and local Party bosses also delayed civilian evacuation, convinced it would send the wrong message about their willingness to defend the city. The decision cost thousands of lives.

"WE WOULD DEFY HITLER'S CRUEL ORDER THAT OUR CITY BE ERASED FROM THE EARTH"

A dysentery epidemic then struck the population, who, already severely weakened by malnutrition, succumbed in huge numbers. Nadia Makarova described the horror in a letter to her sister: "After two weeks of sickness and diarrhoea our dear and beloved mother died… Three days before mother died I lost little Misha and Fedya, now I have only two children left." Even as spring approached the daily death toll remained at between 20,00 and 25,000. As Olga Freidenberg said: "It was a flood of death that no one could handle."

Then, on 8 March, Women's Day (a traditional Soviet holiday), the authorities ordered the city's female population out onto the streets to begin a massive clear-up of snow, rubble and refuse. A week later there were 100,000 of them spending several hours a day cleaning up. Remarkably, this collective effort began to work, as Elena Martilla acclaimed: "We would defy Hitler's cruel order that our city should be erased from the Earth… we were proud to be called Leningraders."

Finally, on Wednesday 15 April, the nurse Vera Pavlova was working in a hospital when: "We all heard the sound of a tram bell clanging. There was a gasp of astonishment… it's victory!" Gefreiter Falkenhorst was in the German trench lines: "I began to lose my faith in Hitler when I heard the sound of tramcars on Leningrad's streets."

The siege would cost the lives of one million Leningraders and would only finally be lifted on 27 January 1944, but that first terrible winter was over. Poet Olga Berggolts endured the whole siege and wrote a poem that now stands engraved in the vast Piskaryov Memorial Cemetery where her own husband is buried:

"Know you who gaze upon these stones,
None is forgotten, and nothing is forgotten."

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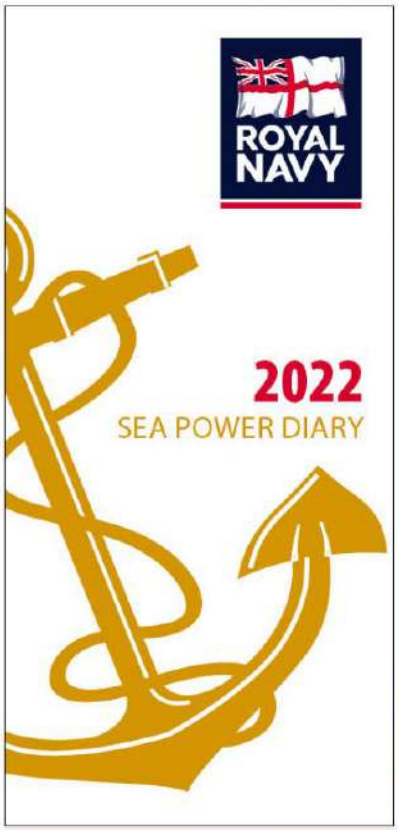

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WAY OF THE SAMURAI

WORDS **BEN GAZUR**

The common view of warrior classes from bygone eras is one of bloody violence and rough manners – but the samurai turned their lives into works of art

Source: Wiki / PD / Art

When we think of the samurai we often think of bushido – the 'Way of the Warrior'. But this moral code that governed the actions of the samurai was never actually a single philosophy, as different clans followed different rules. A closer look at Japanese culture, however, shows us how the samurai grew from simple soldiers to become the warrior poets and philosophers we know them as today.

Higashiyama culture

Much of what we consider as distinctively 'samurai' is derived from Higashiyama culture that developed in the Ashikaga shogunate in the 15th century. Under Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa there was a harmonisation between the cultures enjoyed at court and those of the warrior samurai. It was no longer sufficient to be a bold fighter: samurai were now expected to cultivate the arts and act in accordance with philosophical principles.

"IT WAS NO LONGER SUFFICIENT TO BE A BOLD FIGHTER: SAMURAI WERE NOW EXPECTED TO CULTIVATE THE ARTS AND ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES"

Yoshimasa planned his own retirement in the Temple of the Silver Pavilion in the Higashiyama hills outside of Kyoto, from which this pinnacle of Japanese culture derives its name. The construction of this building and the life of contemplation and artistry Yoshimasa enjoyed there shaped Japanese aesthetics for generations.

Yoshimasa patronised Noh theatre, employed talented ink painters, celebrated ikebana flower arranging and raised the Japanese tea ceremony to an art. The small room constructed at the Silver Pavilion for drinking tea is the oldest tea room in Japan and a model for all that came later. The Silver Pavilion can be seen as a response to the ornate and glittering Gold Pavilion built to celebrate the warrior culture of earlier generations. Yoshimasa was creating a new, simpler ideal for the samurai.

The works of art Yoshimasa gathered around him formed the basis of the Higashiyama Treasure – priceless paintings and artefacts that are considered national treasures today. Several of his advisers in the collecting of art works were born samurai but devoted their lives to beauty. However, the artworks gathered in the Silver Pavilion were not mere decoration: the Silver Pavilion embodies the philosophy and aesthetics that moulded later samurai thought.

Wabi-sabi

The Silver Pavilion as planned by Yoshimasa was intended to be covered in glittering silver, yet as we see it today it has no gilding. The pavilion is unfinished, weathered and, to Japanese sensibilities, perfect in its imperfection. It is an example of the Japanese ideal of wabi-sabi.

Wabi had originally referred to the miserable state of living in nature, far away from other people, but it shifted in the 15th century towards a wistful melancholy. Sabi was a term meaning thin or withered. Together these two words might conjure up a bleak outlook but when placed together they turned into a notion that the wear and damage objects receive as they are used can be beautiful.

Wabi-sabi is a sense of aesthetics based on the acceptance of transience and imperfection in the world. A flawless object may attract our attention for a moment, but a ceramic bowl with a drip in its glaze gives us pause to consider how it was made and the art of the maker. Age and individuality in an object is respected. The tides of time should leave their mark on an object just as waves on the beach mark time on the sand.

Wabi-sabi was an important principle for samurai because they lived hard lives. They were likely to bear scars from their battles and wield old weapons that had been repaired many times. An acceptance of the fleeting nature of perfection, and life itself, spurred warriors into battle. Wabi-sabi was described in the *Letter of the Heart* that set out the principles of the tea ceremony. It noted that "however cultivated one's manner, a painful self-awareness of one's shortcomings is crucial. Remember that self-assertion and attachment are obstructions". Even a cup of tea could remind a samurai of how to face a battle without fear.

"AN ACCEPTANCE OF THE FLEETING NATURE OF PERFECTION, AND LIFE ITSELF, SPURRED WARRIORS INTO BATTLE"

Wabi-sabi also taught samurai that some things are out of their control. It is perhaps best expressed in the story of Sen no Rikyu when he asked a servant to prepare his tea house. The servant scrubbed it top to bottom and scoured the garden in preparation. When Sen no Rikyu arrived, he shook a maple tree to randomly scatter some leaves. Wabi-sabi was thus achieved in joining human efforts with the transience of nature. In battle you cannot expect the fight to be as neat as your plans.

The same cup of tea that might give a samurai pause to consider the nature of life could also give them hope. Their sense of aesthetics meant that repairs to a damaged vessel should be seen and not hidden. It can even become art as in kintsugi, where pottery is repaired with gold so that the cracks show. Even a battle scar could be beautiful.

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Left: *A 19th-century woodblock of a samurai about to commit suicide, with his farewell poem placed in front of him*

Below: *The samurai Akashi Gidayu prepares to commit suicide, with his farewell poem lying beside him*

© Getty

JISEI DEATH POETRY

In preparation for their death in battle, or as part of ritual suicide, samurai composed a traditional poem bidding farewell to life

Roughly translated as a 'farewell poem to life', a jisei is a poem traditionally composed in preparation for one's death. Drawn from a mixture of Zen Buddhism, Chinese Confucianism and Shinto traditions, jisei poems frequently contain natural imagery as the writer reflects on their life, their place in the world and their transition to the afterlife. Often in the tanka form – 31 syllables over five lines – jisei were written by scholars, poets and monks, and also samurai, whose poems frequently reflected on duty, clan loyalty and the core tenets of bushido.

Centuries ago, samurai would compose their jisei and carry it with them into battle, but they were also written as part of ritual suicide, or seppuku. One famous jisei comes from Asano Naganori, lord of the 47 Ronin, which inspired Japan's most famous folktale. Sentenced to death after attacking a government official, Naganori wrote a poem (1 in the box below) in farewell.

Flowers, particularly Japan's national flower – the cherry blossom, or sakura – often appear in jisei poetry to symbolise the beauty but also the brevity of life. However, many other natural images, as well as seasonal motifs, were used to express the writer's meditations. After his defeat at the Battle of Uji in 1180, the poet and warrior Minamoto no Yorimasa prepared to commit seppuku. His jisei compares himself to a rotten or lifeless tree, reflecting upon his regret at having not produced an heir (2, below).

Before the Battle of Shijonawate in 1348, the young samurai general Kusunoki Masatsura had a premonition of his own death and composed his jisei by carving it onto the door of a temple. In it he expresses his wish to take his place among fellow fallen warriors. He was then defeated in single combat during the battle, and committed seppuku as a result (3, below).

In 1912, General Nogi Maresuke and his wife Shizuko committed suicide on the day of the Meiji Emperor's funeral, following the old samurai tradition of not outliving one's master, known as junshi. In preparation for his death, Nogi wrote his own jisei (4, below)

While Nogi carefully composed his poem to express his enduring loyalty to the emperor, many jisei were not so deliberately planned, and often were spoken aloud or sung spontaneously by the dying. The 15th-century warrior-poet Ota Dokan was assassinated in 1486, and with his final breaths he is said to have composed a poem (5, below).

Yamaoka Tesshu, a celebrated 19th-century samurai, swordsman and calligrapher, composed his jisei in the haiku form. While he was dying of stomach cancer, his poem describes the immediate experience of agony, interceded by the calling of a bird outside – birds and ravens have always been closely associated with death in Japanese tradition (6, below).

FAMOUS JISEI

These lyrical, allusive death poems serve as a deeply moving example of samurai culture. (For the authors and context of each poem, see above)

1 *More than the cherry blossoms*
Inviting a wind to blow them away,
I am wondering what to do
With the remaining springtime

2 *Like a fossil tree*
From which we gather no flowers,
Sad has been my life
Fated no fruit to produce.

3 *I have a feeling*
I will not be returning,
So among the names
Of those who died by the bow
I inscribe my own

4 *The Master of the world*
Has passed away –
And after him,
Eager to serve my lord
Go I

5 *Had I not known*
That I was dead
Already,
I would have mourned
The loss of my life

6 *Tightening my abdomen*
Against the pain.
The caw of a morning crow

THE TRANQUILLITY OF TEA

Japanese samurai had a special relationship with tea

The Japanese tea ceremony, known as cha-no-yu, is inextricably linked to Buddhism. The first reference to the ceremony comes from the 9th century when a monk called Eichu brought tea to Japan from China. After preparing tea for Emperor Saga, it was ordered that tea plantations should be set up. Other Buddhist monks refined both the cultivation and serving of tea.

Tea remained a luxury available only to the court and samurai classes, and the ceremony surrounding it became complex. In the *Letter of the Heart*, written in 1488, Murata Juko codified the philosophy and actions performed at the tea ceremony. The tea was to be central to the event, and gaudy or gilded vessels were abandoned for simple pottery. The 16th-century Zen tea master Sen no Rikyu used the tea ceremony to popularise the aesthetic philosophy of wabi-sabi.

Samurai who entered the tea house would leave their weapons outside so that their differences and conflicts could be shed too. They accepted each other as individuals and not as warriors during the ceremony. Yet the tea ceremony was not an idle relaxation for samurai – it trained them in focus and allowed them to gain insights into others that might be of benefit on the battlefield.

Wabi-sabi developed during the Warring States period. When there was so much conflict it was a comfort to find peace in the passing of all things and a joy to treasure venerable objects that may have been damaged.

Mono no aware

Mono no aware is another term that has no easy translation into English. It can broadly be defined as the wistful realisation that all things are impermanent and it developed from the Buddhist idea of non-attachment.

When your feelings for the passing of a thing match the appearance of decay, you are feeling mono no aware. It's why looking at blossom is so important in Japan; the flowers realise a brilliance for just a few days, but soon wither and pass away. You can curse the flowers as they die or you can enjoy their brief beauty. And maybe they are more beautiful because they do not last. For the samurai who faced death every time they drew a sword, non-attachment helped them to cope with their fears. There is a saying in Japan that "among blossoms the cherry blossom [is best], among men, the warrior". Both may glitter for a time, but the warrior can be cut down just as easily as a blossom blows away.

Shinto and Zen

The adoption of Zen Buddhism led to great changes in 12th-century Japan. This must have left some aristocrats with a deep sense of mono no aware when they saw their way of life passing. The samurai were beginning to grow in importance in society. Shimazu Yoshihiro, the 16th century leader of the Shimazu samurai, wrote a poem reflecting the Zen belief in the transience of life that the samurai were adopting:

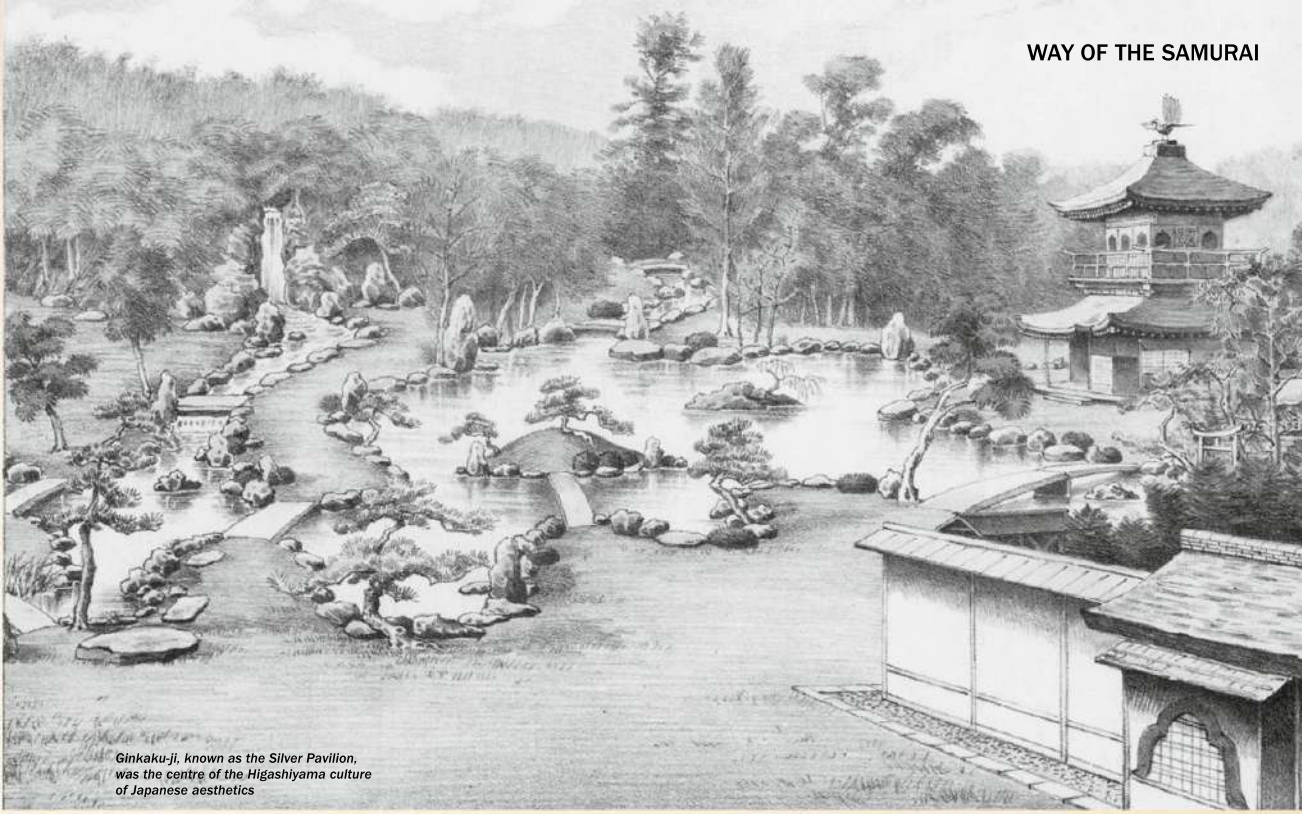
"In the spring – flowers
And in the fall – foliage,
Everything is fleeting.
This is the human race –
Gatekeepers of the void"

Many samurai were followers of Zen and other forms of Buddhism. The 17th-century sword master Takuan Soho wrote a treatise called *The Unfettered Mind* that was influential in how later samurai would view the world through a Buddhist lens. Addressed specifically to the samurai class, it marries the pacific world of the Buddha with the art of war. Battle, properly entered with a clear mind, now becomes a form of meditation: "Although you see the sword that moves to strike you, if your mind is not detained by it and you meet the rhythm of the advancing sword… the sword that was going to cut you down will become your own, and, contrarily, will be the sword that cuts down your opponent."

The samurai often used the term 'mushin' – 'no mind'. It comes from a Zen phrase meaning 'the mind without mind'. It is a state where instinct and training take over and the mind is free from worry, doubt and ego. It was employed by martial artists and was useful on the battlefield where there is no time for thought. A fighting samurai sought to exist within the moment.

The rigorous mental and physical training that Zen monks underwent was thought to be helpful to young warriors. If you were able to bear

The Japanese tea ceremony was about far more than just drinking tea – it inculcated values that the samurai treasured on and off the battlefield



Ginkaku-ji, known as the Silver Pavilion, was the centre of the Higashiyama culture of Japanese aesthetics

"EVEN A CUP OF TEA COULD REMIND A SAMURAI OF HOW TO FACE A BATTLE WITHOUT FEAR"

hardship and starvation without complaint, then you were a useful Japanese soldier. If you could face an enemy without fear or perturbation, then you could be trusted to stand your ground when it mattered most in a fight.

The influence of Buddhism was opposed by some. During the Momoyama period (1573-1603), the warlord Oda Nobunaga attacked monasteries and put Buddhist monks to the sword. The relative decline in Buddhism saw a return to the ancestral worship of Shintoism.

Shintoism is the indigenous faith of Japan that sees the landscape and world as full of spirits called kami. It was Shinto that rounded out the ethical philosophy of the samurai. While Buddhism taught warriors self-control and calm resignation, it was Shinto that taught them their strict loyalty to their masters. The duties of the samurai, their reverence for ancestors and filial piety were derived from Shinto.

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 saw Shintoism become one of the foundations of the new Japan. By providing a sacred core to Japanese nationalism, it supported the administration and hierarchy of the state. Of course, the Meiji Restoration also saw the dissolution of the samurai as a class. From then on, only some of the virtues and philosophies of the samurai would be cultivated among the populace – if they benefited the nation.

The austere and rigorous lifestyles of Zen monks appealed to samurai – as did their teachings that banished fear

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PARIS ▪ FRANCE ▪ 1870-71

THE SIEGE OF PARIS

In September 1870, three great German armies gathered around Paris and commenced a siege that would last more than four months

WORDS **DAVID SMITH**

Ernest Meissonier's 1884 painting symbolises French heroism and resistance during the bitter siege

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 is viewed as a precursor to the First World War. It completed the work begun in 1864 (against Denmark) and 1866 (against Austria) in a series of short, sharp conflicts known collectively as the German Wars of Unification. Modern weaponry, especially breech-loading rifles, coupled with fast mobilisation via railway systems, gave these wars a distinctly modern feel. At the end of them, the various German states were unified under the leadership of Prussia, and Europe was arguably already on course for the two devastating conflicts of the next century.

In 1864, the Dreyse needle gun, a bolt-action breech-loader, gave the Prussians a clear advantage over their brave but outmatched Danish opponents, while the Austrians failed to capitalise on interior lines of communication in 1866. The Prussians had not become invincible, however, despite their frequent depiction as an unstoppable military machine. When Otto von Bismarck provoked the French into war against the German states in 1870, the outcome was far from certain. In fact, the French were viewed as the greater power at the time, having performed well in a series of small overseas conflicts. The French, moreover, had a breech-loading rifle of their own in the form of the Fusil modèle 1866, more commonly known as the Chassepot.

The Second Empire of Napoleon III was well-respected, but its military system was not suited to a large-scale conflict. Its army was professional, but small, and it would take time for conscripts to become effective units. The Prussians had introduced universal military service and their system was already dominant in the northern German states. The Germans also had a far superior staff system, moulded by Helmuth von Moltke, who understood the need to concentrate force and deliver a speedy knockout blow.

The Germans were able to get three large armies mobilised and transported to the front quickly. Commanded by Karl Friedrich von Steinmetz, Prince Frederick Charles and the crown prince of Prussia, they were ready to move while the chaotic French system had

OPPOSING FORCES

FRENCH

LEADER
Louis-Jules Trochu

INFANTRY
60-80,000 Regulars
100,000 Gardes Mobiles
350,000 National Guardsmen

GUNS
Approx. 1,950

VS

GERMAN

LEADER
Helmuth von Moltke

INFANTRY
400,000

CAVALRY
45,000

GUNS
Approx. 1,500

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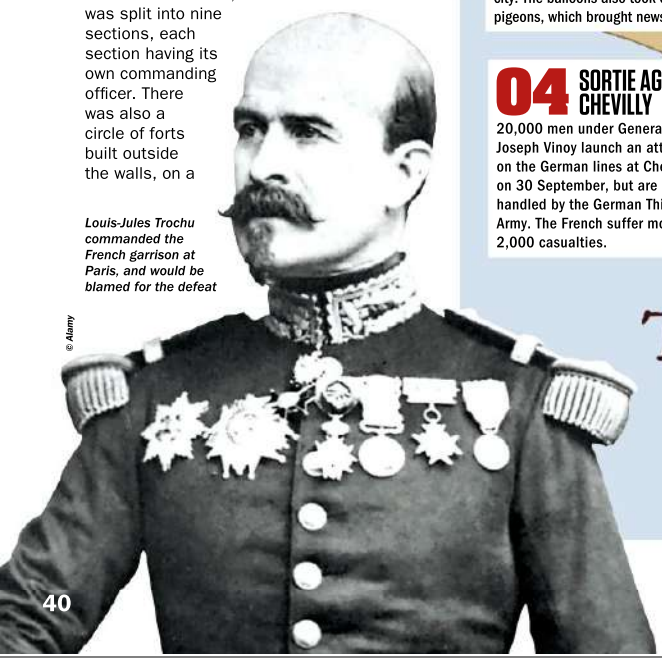
regiments and commanders blundering around trying to find each other. Nevertheless, the French were ready to take the field when the first actions took place in August.

The French may have been able to match the Germans with their Chassepot rifles, but artillery was a different matter. The Germans' rifled guns dominated the French muzzle-loaders and the war went badly for Napoleon III, who was ultimately captured following the Battle of Sedan, on 1-2 September, triggering the fall of the Second Empire. A new Government of National Defence was established and entered into talks with Bismarck, but the pugnacious Prussian was not yet ready to end the war and set such harsh terms that the French had little choice but to fight on. Strasbourg and Metz fell, and despite the French performing great feats in mobilising more men, the war came down to a struggle for the capital city.

German units had appeared in front of the Paris defences on 16 September. The city walls were formidable but of an obsolescent design, and the Germans had already forced the capitulation of many fortresses in a few short weeks, some without any resistance at all. The Paris defences had been augmented over the decades, taking into account improvements in siege artillery. They would have their work cut out against the German guns, which were mounted on newly designed elevated gun carriages, giving them an improved field of fire and also better protection for the gun crews.

Paris had been besieged at least 15 times before, including by Vikings, Romans and the English, and its defensive works had steadily grown in response to the repeated threats. With the city situated in a basin, with various points of high ground around it, it's a poor position for a determined defence. In technical terms, the Paris defences of 1870 consisted of a 'bastioned enceinte' with 98 fronts. The surrounding ditch was about ten metres wide and about six metres deep. The perimeter stretched for 33km, and was split into nine sections, each section having its own commanding officer. There was also a circle of forts built outside the walls, on a



Louis-Jules Trochu commanded the French garrison at Paris, and would be blamed for the defeat

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01 VERSAILLES FALLS

On 18 September, just days after appearing in front of Paris, the Germans capture Versailles and make it their headquarters for the forthcoming siege. It will also be the setting for the final act of the war, the crowning of the Prussian King Wilhelm I as Emperor of Germany.

02 PARIS INVESTED

A day later, the encirclement of Paris is completed (German lines shown in blue). German troops eventually number 400,000, backed by a strong cavalry force, making any breakout by the forces inside the city walls extremely unlikely.

03 THE FIRST BALLOON FLIGHT

The first hot-air balloon, the Neptune, takes off from Montmartre on 23 September. Balloons would become a symbol of French defiance and a valuable way of getting news out of the city. The balloons also took carrier pigeons, which brought news back.

04 SORTIE AGAINST CHEVILLY

20,000 men under General Joseph Vinoy launch an attack on the German lines at Chevilly on 30 September, but are easily handled by the German Third Army. The French suffer more than 2,000 casualties.

The Siege of Paris

(September 1870-January 1871)

French Army movements

Prussian Army movements

07 CROSSING THE MARNE

Trochu launches a major sortie, hurling 80,000 men into action on the east bank of the Marne on 30 November. Crossing the river on pontoon bridges, the French enjoy success but suffer as much from the cold weather as from the German defenders. The sortie fizzles out by 4 December.

08 THE LAST RESISTANCE

On 19 January 1871, Trochu makes his last, futile attempt to offer resistance, but his men suffer 4,000 casualties in attacking the Germans around Buzenval Park. The town of St Cloud is taken but the following day it is recaptured and the French are driven back into the city.

05 CHÂTILLON THREATENED

On 13 October, German troops at Châtillon are pushed back by another French sortie, but their superior artillery makes it impossible for the French to hold on to their gains.

06 RAID FROM SAINT DENIS

The garrison of the fort at Saint Denis makes an unauthorised attack on the German position at Le Bourget on 29 October, capturing it from the elite Prussian Guard. The Germans quickly recapture it and take more than 1,000 prisoners.

Illustration: Rocío Espín

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perimeter of 58km, intended to stop artillery from getting close enough to bombard the main walls. The most recent of the outer forts had been built 30 years previously, and improved gun ranges had already reduced their value. The walls and external forts had also fallen into disrepair in many places, and the war moved so quickly that by the time it became clear the Germans were going to reach Paris, there was very little time to do much about it.

Still, efforts were made to improve the works, with some gates being closed and bomb-proof shelters being dug, and there were hasty efforts to throw up strongpoints even further away from the city walls to keep enemy artillery at bay. This was still ongoing when the first German units arrived, and they were able to easily take possession of some of the outer works.

"PARIS HAD BEEN BESIEGED AT LEAST 15 TIMES BEFORE, INCLUDING BY VIKINGS, ROMANS AND THE ENGLISH, AND ITS DEFENSIVE WORKS HAD STEADILY GROWN IN RESPONSE"

There were around 1,350 guns in emplacements around the walls, with a further 600 field guns available, able to be moved around to concentrate in a single area if needed. Running along the interior of the walls was a railway, which allowed men and guns to be moved quickly to a threatened section.

In terms of manpower, the cupboard was not exactly bare, but it was close. There were between 60,000 and 80,000 regulars, along with a large number of Garde-Mobiles (territorials) and around 350,000 National Guardsmen. Under the leadership of General Louis-Jules Trochu, the National Guard was almost completely dismissed, and it wasn't until far too late that he attempted to train them up into useful units.

By 19 September, the investment of Paris was complete. An army of 220,000 sealed off the city. Perhaps surprisingly, the Germans would refrain from bombarding Paris until the following year, but that does not mean the siege was anything other than a traumatic and shocking experience for the two million civilians and soldiers trapped behind those walls.

Alphonse de Neuville's painting depicts the fighting at Buzenval

***Top, middle:** Hot-air balloons similar to this one were used to communicate with the outside world*

***Top, right:** An entrenched German artillery battery on the outskirts of the French capital*

***Right:** 'Joesphine' battery, manned by Marines, in the Saint-Ouen area outside Paris*

The Germans may have held back from bombarding the city, but Parisians were still awakened at 4am on 19 September by the ominous sounds of artillery – French guns were attempting to keep the enemy from approaching too close.

The Germans quickly took possession of towns along the southern perimeter, including Versailles, Meudon, Clamart and Bagneux. To the east, they moved close to the outlying forts. Bridges leading to the city had been blown up overnight, but the poor state of the outer defences meant they quickly fell into German hands. The garrisons of these positions were reviled as cowards, but in unfinished structures they could hardly have been expected to resist for long.

The French expected (and hoped for) an immediate assault on their main walls, and they believed that it was only the Germans' strict adherence to scientific principles that prevented them from attempting it. In fact, Moltke had no intention of wasting men in unnecessary frontal assaults on the strong walls of the city, and even a bombardment would not be unleashed with the intention of destroying it. "The object of [a bombardment] would not be to destroy Paris," Moltke would later write, "but merely to exert a final pressure on the inhabitants; and this influence would be more effectual after a long blockade had shaken the resolution of the besieged."

This would be a careful, methodical siege, and there could be only one outcome.

One of the most immediate ordeals for the intelligentsia of Paris was the fact that they were almost completely isolated from the outside world. Accustomed to being at the heart of global affairs, and considering their city to be the most civilised and advanced in the world, it was a novel and unpleasant experience to be cut off from all news. Imaginative and often fanciful ideas were put forward, from messenger dogs to glass globes floating down the Seine (the old-fashioned 'message in a bottle' approach) but the hot air balloon proved itself to be the only reliable method. The first balloon took off on 23 September, with another following two days later. The director of the postal service, M Rampont, was impressed (and enterprising) enough to suggest a regular service every two or three days.

Of rather more importance was the departure by balloon of Léon Gambetta, Minister of the Interior in the new Government of National Defence. Gambetta played a key role in the raising of new armies – the fall of the Empire had triggered a wave of national resistance as democracy re-established itself

Food shortages during the siege became so acute that starving Parisians resorted to eating rats

© Getty

An artillery battery photographed during the siege

© Getty

in the form of the Third Republic. Guerrilla bands (francs-tireurs) materialised and began to torment the men guarding the German supply lines, so much so that civilians were executed if their houses were used by snipers.

The Army of the Loire would be the most important of the new National Armies, and it enjoyed some success, recapturing Orléans on 9 November. To the north, the aptly named Army of the North enjoyed some small-scale successes under Louis Faidherbe, a colonial administrator who showed a flair for command. He came unstuck when mounting pressure on Paris forced him to attack at Saint-Quentin, where he suffered catastrophic losses and was effectively knocked out of the war.

Despite these serious efforts to relieve Paris, the city was mostly on its own. Unknown to its inhabitants, a debate was raging at the top of the German command. Bismarck wanted to bombard the city, while Moltke was unwilling to unleash such destruction and potentially turn the opinion of the world against them. As the year wound to a close, starvation became the Germans' most effective weapon.

Controls on food production and pricing were imposed almost as soon as the siege began. It did not take long for horses to be added to the menu, but the needs of the populace were huge. In the early days of the siege, 1,000 sheep and 500 cattle were being slaughtered every day, and by the end the citizens had earned notoriety for unconventional visits to the zoo (the two elephants, Castor and Pollux, being the most famous victims).

Parisians remained upbeat, but hopes that foreign powers would come to France's aid quickly turned to bitterness. The newspapers, still publishing, asked pertinent questions: "Has England forgotten Inkerman?", "Has Italy forgotten Solferino?", "Has America forgotten Lafayette?" On 27 October, the populace was shocked by rumours of the capitulation of Metz, rumours that were quickly confirmed, and the fear grew that Paris might soon be stormed.

"BISMARCK WANTED TO BOMBARD THE CITY, WHILE MOLTKE WAS UNWILLING TO UNLEASH SUCH DESTRUCTION AND POTENTIALLY TURN THE OPINION OF THE WORLD AGAINST THEM"

Trochu was not an aggressive commander, but he was unwilling to just sit in Paris and wait for the Germans to starve him out. If the Germans wouldn't attack, then the French would. Early, tentative sorties met with enough success to convince the general to draw up an ambitious plan for a major offensive against the German forces to the west of the city. This plan, known as Le Plan Trochu, underwent modification, the most significant of which was that it struck eastwards rather than to the west. On 30 November, French units led by Auguste-Alexandre Ducrot made a significant impact on the German lines, but nowhere near enough to break through. Trochu rallied his men for another assault on 21 December, but this was less successful.

Just days later, on 5 January, the German guns began to fire upon Paris. It had taken this long for them to bring up heavy guns and prepare positions within range of Paris itself. A total of 17 batteries (with 98 guns) opened fire on the south of the city.

By this time, dog, cat and rat had joined horse on the butchers' slab, while frantic attempts were made to find scientific solutions to the insurmountable problems facing the trapped population. Synthesised milk and foodstuffs, fanciful weapons (as well as some genuinely interesting ideas, such as armoured wagons) and more innovative ways of manufacturing gunpowder all offered sparks of hope, but the situation was grim.

"God have mercy on us!" an American eyewitness recorded in his journal. "At this moment the shells are falling near the center of Paris… They fall here and there and everywhere on the south side of the city." As proved the case in the Second World War, however, the attack on a civilian population did not provoke panic or uprising, but rather a bitter stubbornness. "Everyone is filled with rage and no one is alarmed," the American witness noted.

The bombardment could not go unanswered, and Trochu made the last of his great sorties on 19 January, sending 90,000 men to attack the German lines around the Château of Buzenval. The assault was gobbled up by the Germans at a cost of 4,000 casualties, and the French had made their last roll of the dice. After the bombardment of the city intensified, with siege guns now being used against the north of the city as well, the inevitable armistice negotiations were opened.

Peace terms were agreed on 28 January 1871, and were punitive in the extreme. As well as losing Alsace and most of Lorraine (which would remain bones of contention and contributing factors in the start of the First World War), France was also ordered to pay five billion francs in compensation. A 'German Empire' was announced at Versailles, and Bismarck had achieved his goal of uniting Germany under Prussian leadership. The consequences of a militaristic and united Germany would be devastating for Europe and, eventually, the world.

FURTHER READING

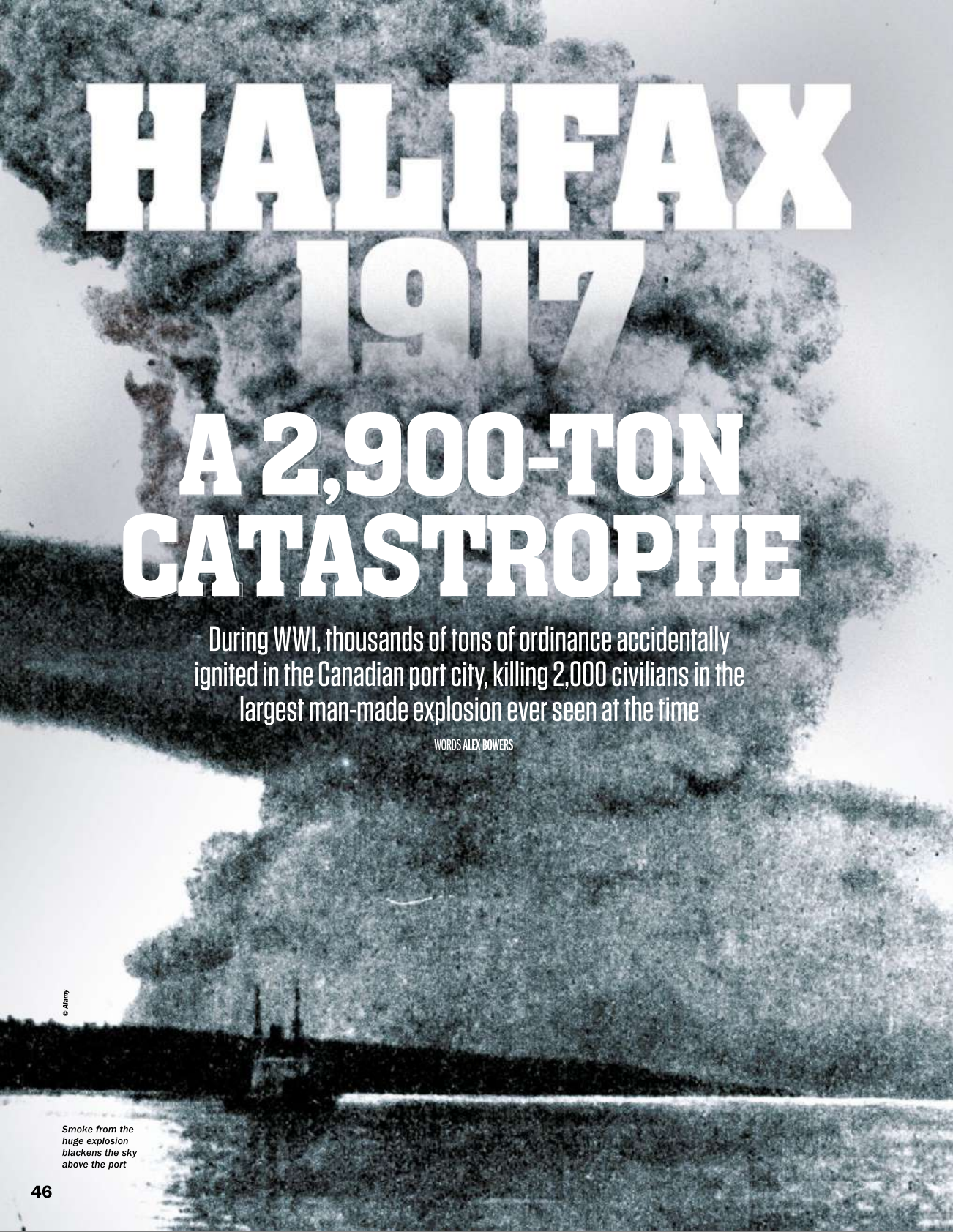
- Brian Holden Reid, *The American Civil War and the Wars of the Industrial Revolution*
- Robert Lowry Sibbet, *The Siege of Paris*

HALIFAX 1917

A 2,900-TON CATASTROPHE

During WWI, thousands of tons of ordinance accidentally ignited in the Canadian port city, killing 2,000 civilians in the largest man-made explosion ever seen at the time

WORDS **ALEX BOWERS**



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Smoke from the huge explosion blackens the sky above the port

The 6 December 1917 started like any other day for Vincent Coleman, a telegraph dispatcher for the Canadian Government Railways, based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He left his wife, Frances, and children at home in the morning and walked the few blocks downhill to his workplace at Richmond Station. His job was to control traffic flow in and out of the maritime city, directing the incoming cargo-laden trains to their correct wharf. Pier 6 stood only a short distance away, a site that, in a matter of hours, would become the epicentre of the greatest man-made explosion before the 1945 atomic bomb detonations. Coleman had seen his family for the last time, though his legacy would live on.

At the time there was little concern other than the crisp cold of winter and the prospect of snow. The war, while tragic, had brought commerce and bustle to Halifax and neighbouring Dartmouth. Businesses flourished, throngs of people crowded the docks and ships bound for Europe awaited orders in the harbour. To the northwest, the Bedford Basin formed a narrow passage where vessels, guided by harbour pilots at the helm, could enter and exit, protected by two anti-submarine nets made of steel mesh. Gates in the nets were opened in the day and closed at night to prevent the boldest of U-Boat captains from attacking. The more than 40 ships inside its boundaries should have been safe when, just before 8am, Mont Blanc, an Allied-aligned freighter carrying 2,925 metric tons of explosives, hastened from the harbour and towards disaster.

French Captain Aimé Le Medec had ceded control to Pilot Francis Mackey, who kept Mont Blanc to the Dartmouth side of the narrows as per standard regulations. All was well on deck and in the four holds filled with a volatile cargo of picric acid, trinitrotoluene (TNT), benzene and gun cotton. However another vessel, the Norwegian Imo, piloted by William Hayes and bound for Halifax, had swung into the narrows. She posed little threat until a third ship, the outbound Clara, steered close to the Halifax shoreline in the face of oncoming traffic, against protocol. Clara did not give way to Imo, leading to the fatal decision to turn Imo into the other shipping lane.

Mont Blanc, steaming dead ahead despite the new obstacle, blew the first warning whistle. More signals followed from both vessels, causing only confusion. Neither appeared willing to change course as the distance between them closed rapidly. Only when it was too late did Mont Blanc manoeuvre hard-left and, almost simultaneously, Imo was ordered into reverse as her bow jutted out. Collision was now inevitable. Mont Blanc's steel hull buckled under the sheer force of Imo's impact. Barrels of benzene came crashing down, spilling their flammable contents across the deck. Sparks from Imo's reverse-engaged engine ignited the explosive material. The fire blazed as Mont Blanc, its crew having abandoned ship, drifted helplessly towards the neighbourhood of Richmond.

"HOLD UP THE TRAIN. AMMUNITION SHIP AFIRE IN HARBOR MAKING FOR PIER 6 AND WILL EXPLODE. GUESS THIS WILL BE MY LAST MESSAGE. GOODBYE, BOYS"

Coleman had been informed of what was happening a short distance away from his office. He was aware that, minutes after the collision, Mont Blanc had run ever closer to Pier 6 with the fire on deck spreading. Outside, people gathered at the water's edge, stood at their windows, schools and workplaces, and climbed onto rooftops to get a better view. They thought they were observing a firework display. They smiled, laughed and cheered while flames shot up 30 metres. They pointed in awe at the thick plume of black, oily smoke rising into the sky. Few would be spared from the onslaught about to unfold. Coleman at first ran for his life, only to pause, remembering that a train filled with 300 passengers was en route, and return to his seat with his telegraph key in hand. His final words were directed to Rockingham Station 8km away: "Hold up the train. Ammunition ship afire in harbor making for Pier 6 and will explode. Guess this will be my last message. Goodbye, boys."

At 9:04am, a supersonic blast of almost unimaginable magnitude tore through stone, steel, brick and bone, reshaping two cities and the lives of their residents forever. An estimated 1,600 people died instantly, including Coleman, as internal organs were

The aftermath of the blast in the harbour at Halifax, Nova Scotia

© Getty

The blast reduced buildings in the port city to matchwood

Bad weather hampered the search for survivors

FORGOTTEN HERO

Little about Dr Clement Ligoure's life has been preserved in records. All that remains clear is that he originated from Trinidad, lived in New York City for a short while and was divorced there, and graduated from Queen's University in Ontario, Canada, in 1916, two years before the 47-year-ban on Black medical students. He had moved to Halifax to help recruit members for the No. 2 Construction Battalion, the country's only all-Black battalion. Authorities had initially promised him the position of the unit's chief medical officer, only to later tell him that he'd failed his medical exam by one point and, therefore, could not join, despite Dr Ligoure having bought his uniform. He has no known death certificate, nor does his passing appear in any newspaper of the time.

Dr Clement Ligoure, pictured here in 1913, treated hundreds of victims of the explosion, but his efforts went unheralded at the time

smashed and bodies were thrown around like rag dolls. The shockwave from the explosion hurled shards of glass, wood and metal through the streets, blinding and mortally wounding anyone in their path. Structures became kindling and rubble. Nearby Africville, home to roughly 400 Black Canadians, suffered significant damage and loss of life. Across the water in Dartmouth, the Indigenous Mi'kmaw community called Maskwiekati Malpek (directly translated to Birchbark Cove but often known as Turtle Grove or Tuft's Cove) was obliterated. A 5,000°C fireball – almost as hot as parts of the sun – vaporised water around Mont Blanc, which no longer existed, and created an 18-metre high tsunami that swept away entire families of the Mi'kmaw people. The wave also reached Halifax as ships crashed over the waterfront and into what remained of the city.

Then came the cries from the ruins while, from the sky, benzene residue rained down to turn scorched skin a deep black. Victims walked naked, the clothes ripped off their backs, calling out the names of their loved ones. The landscape resembled the trenches of the Western Front some 5,000km away, while smoke from the explosion itself, accompanied by dozens of smaller fires started by toppled wood-burning stoves, bellowed more than 3,000 metres above. In surrounding towns and cities, the smoke was far from the only sign of what had taken place. In Lawrencetown, about 16km away, people had recoiled from the explosion's energy; in Truro, 80km from the blast, hotel windows had been blown out; 180km away in Charlottetown, situated in the neighbouring Canadian Province of Prince Edward Island, and as far as Cape Breton, 320km away, the sound of the explosion had carried like an ominous thunderstorm. But, miraculously, the hundreds of train passengers that Coleman had attempted to reach were safe. Despite the telegram failing to alert them directly, it had at least informed nearby communities and would enable faster mobilisation. The locomotive continued on its journey, its passengers now tasked with searching the wreckage for the injured and dead.

Dr Clement Ligoure, Nova Scotia's first Black physician, was ready and waiting for the surge through his doors. His private surgical practice on North Street, which he had established after being denied hospital privileges, was then manned only by his housekeeper and a railway porter boarding at his house. The first casualties arrived almost immediately following the incident. He testified later that there were "very severe cases, jaws cut, noses off. One hand hanging off". Many of those flooding his office, eventually numbering in the hundreds, had been turned away elsewhere as medical facilities reached capacity throughout the day. Such was the influx at Dr Ligoure's newly designated dressing station that, finally, several nurses and military personnel were dispatched to provide support.

More help was needed. In Camp Hill Convalescent Hospital, which looked after disabled veterans, all of its 280 beds were taken by victims of the blast and, by accounts, over 1,400 more wounded flooded its dorms. An American coastal passenger steamer, USS Old Colony, having survived the blast with only minor damage, was transformed into a 150-bed floating hospital to accommodate the ever-increasing number of injured. Emergency shelters for the 25,000 homeless were set up in the Salvation Army Citadel, church halls, theatres, a monastery and any houses that were still standing. News had also spread across the border. By 10pm that evening, Massachusetts Governor Samuel McCall had organised for a train carrying surgeons, nurses and medical supplies to travel to Nova Scotia. The state later donated $700,000 to the Massachusetts-Halifax Relief Fund, a contribution that, with time, played a vital role in recovery operations.

For some, that relief couldn't come soon enough. Hundreds remained trapped under collapsed buildings as night set in and temperatures dropped. Many were children. One dead infant had been draped in a soldier's greatcoat, that of deceased Sapper Claudin Gaudet, 19. In the pocket was a letter from his brother serving overseas, instructing Claudin to "stay in Halifax" for "this war is no picnic". The search for the survivors nevertheless pushed on, even after rumours of an imminent second explosion – a threat that never materialised. Meanwhile, when his duties at the practice

© Getty

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This photo, looking toward the Dartmouth side of the harbour, shows the extent of the damage

"A 5,000°C FIREBALL – ALMOST AS HOT AS PARTS OF THE SUN – VAPORISED WATER AROUND MONT BLANC"

were done, Dr Ligoure packed up a medical bag and began to visit patients at their homes, dedicating only a couple of hours to sleep. He didn't charge a single cent for his services, though, unlike the late Coleman, his actions went unnoticed by most.

Outside of the ravaged city, smoke still visible on the horizon, ten-year-old Rachel Cope had awoken to strange circumstances. One of the last things she remembered was her heading to Indian School with her brother and cousins when they noticed a burning ship in the harbour. Her world had turned black not long after. She stirred from her unconscious state to find herself wrapped in blankets on a blown-out door. What she didn't know then was that a priest had already given her a final blessing. Her brother, Henry, and cousin Louis were dead, and her mother, Sarah, and sister Annie were severely burned. Three-year-old Frank, another brother, would eventually succumb to his injuries, while her younger siblings Leo, Matilda and Mary were at that point unaccounted for. Meanwhile, though Rachel hadn't broken anything, it hurt to move and breathe, and so she blacked out again. The next time she came to, the door she lay on was moving. Rachel's family was dragging her the 20km from her destroyed home in Maskwiekati Malpek to Windsor Junction – fearing, perhaps, that further carnage was yet to come; that the Germans had seemingly attacked and would attack again. But the only disturbance was in the clouds as the first snowflakes dropped from the sky and landed around her – a blizzard was coming.

Shortly before 9am the next morning, 7 December, a white sheet of snow blanketed the rubble and rescue attempts came to a grinding halt. Throughout the day, the wind increased as the snow fell with more force. Drifts deepened, trucks and cars became useless, and trains were hampered by the covered railway tracks. Rachel and her surviving family had escaped the new onslaught, finding refuge away from Halifax, but for those still trapped, hope faded quickly. When, three days later, a second blizzard brought further misery, residents reluctantly turned their attention away from infirmaries and towards mortuaries, one of the few aspects of recovery with precedent. Years before the war, the Titanic had sunk some 700 nautical miles from Nova Scotia. John Barnstead, then the city coroner, had improvised an identification system to keep track of remains efficiently and respectfully. His method would be used again on a much greater scale. It offered closure to anyone willing to brave the fierce, unrelenting weather. Only then could the healing begin.

On 17 December 1917, the Wreck Commissioners Court was convened to gather testimony from witnesses, the proceedings of which ultimately determined that Mont Blanc's Captain Aimé Le Medec and Pilot Francis Mackey were solely responsible for the collision. Mackey spent a short time in prison before the decision was overturned. The final conclusion didn't come until February 1920, when the Privy Council in London declared that both ships' captains were jointly to blame. By that point Halifax bore little resemblance to its once disfigured self, its structures rebuilt and its people, while scarred physically and mentally, having moved on as best as they could. Rachel Cope lived for many more years, got married, and went on to have a family. Dr Ligoure closed his practice and, with little money – or, indeed, renown – to his name, died in 1922. He was just 32 years old. Coleman's family had survived their ordeal and remembered him fondly, along with the 2,000 others who had been killed, 500 of whom were children.

The help provided by Boston is recognised still today – every year since 1971 Nova Scotia has gifted the American city with a Christmas tree that stands proudly in the Boston Commons. It tells a story of camaraderie and, above all else, the tenacity of humankind in the face of immense peril.

HALIFAX AT WAR

Halifax was strategically vital to the Allied cause before the explosion and continued to be after recovery efforts. Thousands of vessels, including Mont Blanc, travelled to the port to be shepherded by the Royal Canadian Navy (then in its infancy) in convoys across the Atlantic Ocean. It was also from here that around 350,000 of Canada's 620,000-strong expeditionary force left to fight in war-ravaged Europe. Today, an archway with the words "The Last Steps" written above it and trailed by symbolic boot prints below stands proudly on the waterfront. It shows where these servicemen and women had their final moments on native soil, 60,000 of whom never returned.

The city again became a hub of wartime activity when Canada declared war on Nazi Germany in 1939. Once more, the port served as a strategic mobilisation and shipment point. A total of 17,593 vessels passed through Halifax Harbour during the Second World War, notably a large contingent of Norwegian whalers who, unable to return to their occupied country, established a military training facility in nearby Lunenburg. Meanwhile, Halifax Shipyards repaired some 7,000 ships damaged in the Battle of the Atlantic. Today, the Canadian Forces Base Halifax (CFB Halifax) is home to Canada's East Coast Navy and the country's largest military base, hosting approximately 11,000 personnel.

© Alamy

Her Majesty's Canadian Dockyard in Halifax played a vital role in both world wars

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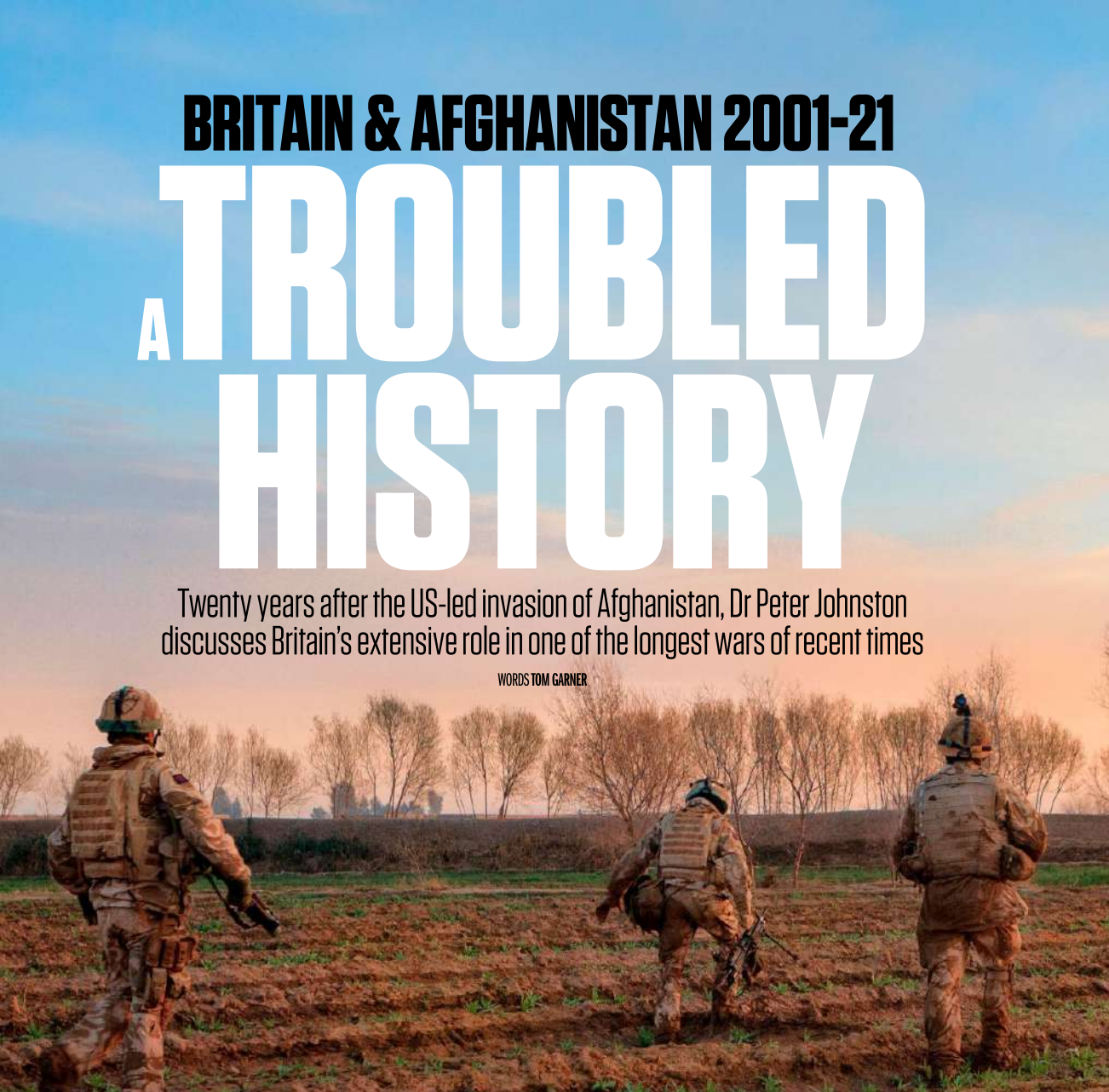
BRITAIN & AFGHANISTAN 2001-21

A TROUBLED HISTORY

Twenty years after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, Dr Peter Johnston discusses Britain's extensive role in one of the longest wars of recent times

WORDS **TOM GARNER**



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British Troops during Operation Moshtarak in Helmand Province

September 2021 nominally marks the final withdrawal of American and NATO military personnel from Afghanistan. First deployed as part of a US-led coalition in 2001, the mission to find al-Qaeda leaders after 9/11 ended up toppling the Taliban regime. What followed was a 20-year conflict that saw determined attempts to rebuild the country but also bloody resistance from the Taliban and other opposition groups.

Britain's armed forces provided extensive security in Afghanistan, particularly in Helmand Province from 2006. Its personnel paid a heavy price, with 454 being killed during 2001-14. The main British combat mission ended in 2014 but the war continued until the Taliban defeated the NATO-trained Afghan National Army and recaptured Kabul on 15 August 2021. During these two decades the Afghan people have suffered terrible casualties, with tens of thousands of civilians killed and hundreds of thousands more wounded or displaced.

Dr Peter Johnston, Head of Collections and Research at the Royal Air Force Museum, explains Britain's long involvement in this complex and often misunderstood conflict that has caused enormous suffering and shaped the early history of the 21st century*.

**This interview was conducted in July 2021 before the capture of Kabul by the Taliban on 15 August.*

A British paratrooper observes his position in a new ISAF military base in western Kabul, 28 January 2002

Senior Aircraftman Joe Ralph of the RAF hands a bottle of water to an Afghan child during an ISAF patrol in Kandahar Province, 19 July 2008

"IT WAS ABOUT REMOVING THE TALIBAN FROM POWER AND PURSUING A 'QUEST FOR JUSTICE' AFTER 9/11, WHICH HAD SHOCKED THE WORLD"

Dr Peter Johnston is Head of Collections and Research at the Royal Air Force Museum. Before his current role he was Head of Collections Research and Academic Access at the National Army Museum

Royal Marine Joe Harvey watches as British forces come under fire from the Taliban near Kajaki, Helmand, 18 March 2007

Right: The British fought a variety of enemies in Afghanistan, from the Taliban and foreign mercenaries to narcotics warlords

AN IMPERIAL PAST

How extensive is Britain's military association with Afghanistan?

I'm always keen to stress that this is Britain's 'latest' war in Afghanistan. There were actually three previous ones and I do wonder how long it will be – from a British perspective – until we start referring to it as the 'Fourth British-Afghan War'.

The first war was between 1839-42. Like the most recent conflict it was initially very successful but ended with Britain withdrawing in one of the worst military disasters of the 19th century. The second was fought between 1878-80, with British-Indian forces ensuring that Afghanistan remained free from Russian interference. While this second war was eventually successful the British suffered several setbacks. The third war was in 1919 when the British were again called in to fight escalating violence after a peace settlement had been established.

When you look at the history of British involvement in Afghanistan there are so many parallels, although the British successes in 2001 during the invasion tend to be almost forgotten. When people talk about the recent war, it's Helmand during 2006-14 that they tend to focus on.

What was the state of the British armed forces in 2001?

They were bigger in 2001 than in 2014, by the time they withdrew. In 2001 they were built around some key components; this included a 1998 defence review that looked at what happened since the end of the Cold War.

During the 1990s, Britain had fought in the Gulf War and had had extensive operations in the Balkans and Northern Ireland. The review looked at what that meant for the strategic realities in a British context. The government recognised that after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact there was no longer a direct military threat to the UK. However, the world was an increasingly unpredictable place and there were indirect threats that could come from anywhere around the globe.

The review posited a major shift towards expeditionary armed forces. It identified that the British armed forces should be able to respond to an international crisis that required a military effort on the scale of the Gulf War. This effectively meant a deployed division. It also saw that the British should be able to undertake an extended overseas deployment of a smaller intensity. This could perhaps mean a combat brigade with supporting air and naval forces. The armed forces had to be big enough to do both of those things and interestingly that is what happened in Afghanistan.

Significantly, the 1998 review claimed that it did not expect both of those deployments to be maintained simultaneously for more than six months. When we look at combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan you already see that overstretch. The armed forces were experiencing something that had been specifically argued against by the review.

Considering Britain's military history in Afghanistan, was there any sense in 2001 that re-entering the country was not a good idea?

It's important to understand what the original 2001 deployment to Afghanistan was. It was

THE ROAD TO WAR

Soviet troops in Afghanistan

Taliban fighters advance towards the front line near Kabul, 18 February 1995

The invasion of Afghanistan was preceded by decades of internal instability that included Soviet intervention, the rise of the Taliban and the fostering of terrorist activities

1979-89

SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR

The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan during the Cold War, which results in a brutal occupation. About two million Afghans die in the conflict, although the mujahideen eventually eject the Soviets.

1989-92

AFGHAN CIVIL WAR

Mujahideen groups defeat the Soviet-backed Republic of Afghanistan and attempt to form a coalition government. Infighting instead breaks out, which sparks another civil war.

1992-96

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

Several mujahideen groups fight each other for control of Afghanistan. A new militia force known as the Taliban emerges and grows in strength, capturing Kabul in September 1996.

1996-2001

ISLAMIC EMIRATE

Although fighting continues among Afghan militias, the Taliban control 85 percent of the country. Governing as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the Taliban preside over a highly repressive regime.

Northern Alliance fighters battle against the Taliban, November 2001

British and American artillerymen fire 105mm artillery rounds during a live fire exercise at Bagram Airbase, 11 June 2002 © Getty

"HELMAND HAD BEEN RELATIVELY STABLE BUT THE BRITISH ARRIVED AND PROVOKED A VIOLENT RESPONSE FROM A RESURGENT TALIBAN"

about removing the Taliban from power and pursuing a 'quest for justice' after 9/11, which had shocked the world. It was considered a different operation – it was not about pacifying a region on imperial borders, because the British Empire no longer existed. It was essentially a surgical military operation to remove the Taliban, although the far more complicated human level certainly wasn't appreciated.

The first stage of the war was actually very successful. The Taliban were driven from power and fled Kabul in November 2001. Subsequent operations cleared them out of their various strongholds and there was even the creation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). This continued to operate in Afghanistan, particularly from 2006 onwards. That actually grew out of the British component – the 3rd Mechanised Division – and it was the British that deployed as the first ISAF peacekeepers because it wasn't then a combat operation. For a period it looked as though success had actually been achieved.

INVASION, IRAQ & HELMAND

What operations did the British participate in during the invasion?

The British were split among multiple levels. There were RAF and naval assets along with Royal Marines commandos deployed on the ground. The army was represented by 2 Para and the navy by 40 Commando initially and all of them were taking part in operations during 2001-03.

There was also a lot of Special Forces activity. There are amazing photographs of Special Forces running around on horseback with Afghan militia groups such as the Northern Alliance. They worked with them to defeat the Taliban and captured cities like Herat. They would clear Afghan strongholds and drive them back into cave systems.

After 2001, there was a sense of establishing security. In 2004, RAF Harriers were deployed for the first time as an 'in country' asset rather than being called in from elsewhere to provide close air support. Britain deployed quite a large number of troops into Afghanistan to initially secure it. They maintained this presence until 2006, when they were mainly pivoted south to Helmand.

What was the British role in Helmand?

ISAF and NATO expanded across Afghanistan. Having pacified the region around Kabul, the idea was that the rest of the country should go through a similar stage of reconstruction for a secure future.

The British moved south to Helmand. They thought this was an area where they could do some good, including pouring in money from

© Getty

The Taliban lifted restrictions for Osama bin Laden to conduct jihad

The 11 September attacks involved the use of hijacked aircraft to launch assaults on American home territory, © Getty

Citizens of Kabul cheer Northern Alliance fighters as they enter the city, 13 November 2001 © Getty

Anti-Taliban Afghan fighters watch several explosions from American aerial bombings over the Tora Bora Mountains, 16 December 2001 © Alamy

1996-2001

AL-QAEDA

The extremist organisation al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, uses Afghanistan as a base of operations to plan jihadist terrorist attacks against the West, with the USA being a particular target.

11 SEP 2001

9/11

Al-Qaeda coordinates four terrorist attacks against the United States on the same day. Almost 3,000 people are killed, which prompts President George W Bush to declare a "War on Terror".

OCT-DEC 2001

INVASION

After the Taliban refuses to extradite Osama bin Laden, the USA leads an invasion of Afghanistan as part of a NATO coalition. The coalition fights alongside the Northern Alliance Afghan militia group to topple the Taliban.

13-14 NOV 2001

FALL OF KABUL

Kabul falls to the Northern Alliance with assistance from the US-led NATO coalition. The capture of the Afghan capital is a severe blow to Taliban control of Afghanistan.

"THE CAPTURE OF THE AFGHAN CAPITAL IS A SEVERE BLOW TO TALIBAN CONTROL"

6-17 DEC 2001

BATTLE OF TORA BORA

The Americans lead an attack to kill or capture Osama bin Laden in the cave complex of Tora Bora. Hundreds of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters are killed but bin Laden escapes. He remains at large until he is killed 2011 by US Navy SEALs in Pakistan.

Taliban soldiers photographed on 10 October, 1996 in Kabul, Afghanistan

© Getty

A Welsh guards mortar platoon fires from their position in 2007

© Alamy

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international aid. The initial mission was about provincial reconstruction and a 'hearts and minds' project that opened schools, clinics and so on. Until 2006, Helmand had been relatively stable but the British arrived and provoked a violent response from a resurgent Taliban. In July 2006, that mission changed from peacekeeping to combat.

What impact did the Iraq War have on the British mission in Afghanistan?

It was incredibly significant. There is certainly a view among historians that the success in Afghanistan emboldened the Americans and British into conducting a similar operation in Iraq. However, Iraq was an entirely different environment and it required considerably more resources.

From 2003, the British deployed large numbers of personnel and resources into Iraq and it became the main focus for the next few years. Afghanistan turned into a long-term stabilisation mission but the move to Helmand and the way it blew up created a huge problem for the British. They were suddenly fighting two major operations on two fronts, which required heavy sustainment. From a sheer logistical perspective these were happening far away from Britain, so maintaining and supervising them was a huge effort in itself – let alone combat troops.

Camp Bastion in Helmand grew to the size of Reading purely as a logistical base. In Iraq, the British were centred in Basra. This required intense operations to maintain their presence before they could even think about stabilisation.

To what extent was the conflict in Afghanistan a 'conventional' war?

Afghanistan wasn't a conventional conflict from the very beginning. The British deployed naval and RAF assets for transport and supply but it was a light infantry force on the ground. These were the Paras, Royal Marines commandos and Special Forces who were the best tools the British had on hand for these kinds of operations.

What evolved were elements of counter-insurgency and a complicated landscape of who the British were fighting. They weren't always fighting the Taliban: there were also foreign fighters, local militia forces and narcotics warlords. The British had to spend a huge amount of time trying to understand who they were fighting and how they could effectively counter them. They had to do this while undergoing rotations and conducting intense operations in Iraq.

What notable battles were the British involved in?

From 2006 the overall British operation was called Operation Herrick and within that were several operations, particularly during 2009-10. These were all about trying to surge troops to provide security for particular events. Operation Panther's Claw was about providing security for the 2009 presidential election by securing canal crossings and key settlements. Operation Moshtarak involved driving the Taliban out of areas in Helmand and trying to establish more regular safe zones where provincial reconstruction could take place. The British could instigate positive programmes like medical aid, education and provide the basic levels of security that you needed for those things to function.

Royal Marines take cover while blasting a hole in the wall during an operation near Kajaki, Helmand, 18 March 2007

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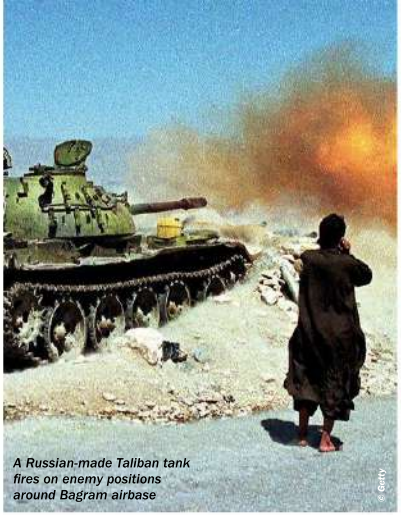
An RAF GR7 Harrier takes off from Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, 25 April 2006



A Russian-made Taliban tank fires on enemy positions around Bagram airbase

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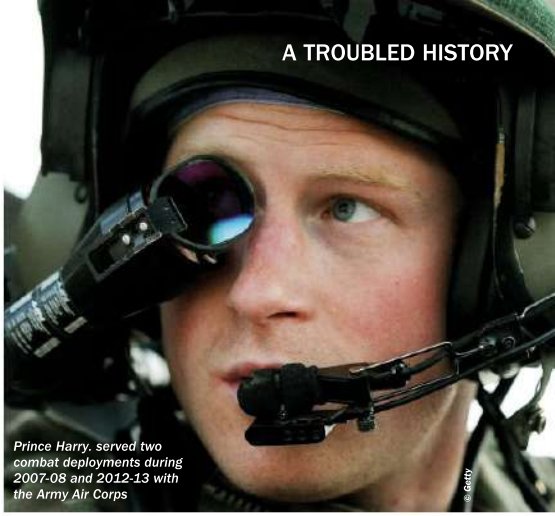

Prince Harry. served two combat deployments during 2007-08 and 2012-13 with the Army Air Corps

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There were other operations where the British were actively engaged. They had Forward Operating Bases operating out of patrol houses and were engaged in Helmand from Nawzad in the north to Marjah in the south.

The British were involved in big operations but they were also working multi-nationally. They increasingly worked alongside the Afghan National Army and security forces to build up to a stage where the Afghans could take on a greater (and ultimately complete) level of responsibility.

The British Army's role in Afghanistan is well-known, but what was the RAF's contribution?

The RAF contribution was significant. They provided close-combat air support with Harrier and Tornado aircraft but they were also in command of the airstrip at Camp Bastion. This was a lifeline to the UK and at one point Bastion was Britain's fourth busiest airport.

Some of the most enduring pictures we have of Afghanistan are soldiers crouched with a Chinook landing soldiers or evacuating casualties. These were flown by RAF pilots with medical teams on board. The medical evacuation procedures developed in Afghanistan saved thousands of lives. The way that battlefield medicine improved, even with injuries that people would have sadly succumbed to just decades before, meant that people were surviving because of the amazing medical care they received.

"WHAT IS COMPLETELY ABSENT FROM POPULAR MEMORY IS THE GOOD THE BRITISH DID IN AFGHANISTAN. THEY ACHIEVED POSITIVE CHANGE WHILE THEY WERE THERE"

PERCEPTIONS OF WAR

How were the British perceived by the Taliban and Afghan civilians?

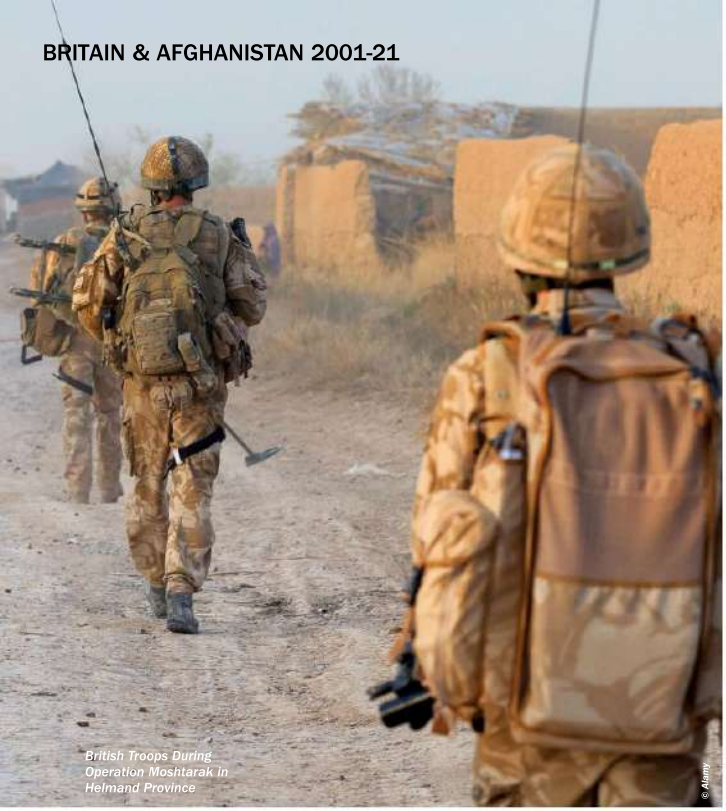
It's difficult because 'Taliban' is given as this catch-all term. There was a real gamut of enemy fighters and there are also lots of stories about Afghan fighters (and even some civilians) not really appreciating who the British were. Stories have emerged of Afghans saying: 'We're going to throw you out again because we don't want you Russians here.' The British are obviously not Russians but this is how the Afghans saw external people and invaders. They saw them as part of this long tradition of people they fought against and wanted to get rid of.

In places like Kabul, the cultural memory of the British occupation and 19th century retreat remained quite strong. It wasn't always an incredibly hostile environment but it wasn't a particularly friendly one either. People were happy that the Taliban had gone but they weren't necessarily happy with the ongoing security presence that was required. It wouldn't have happened without foreign troops occupying their country and so it was a very complicated landscape. The British in Helmand actually brought enormous benefits: healthcare, education, building roads and improving communications. At the same time, they were not entirely welcomed.

Images of RAF CH-47 Chinook helicopters assisting British soldiers became some of the defining pictures of Britain's experience in Afghanistan

© Getty

Prince William lays a wreath and salutes the British soldiers killed in Afghanistan during a Remembrance Day ceremony at Camp Bastion, 14 November 2010



British Troops During Operation Moshtarak in Helmand Province

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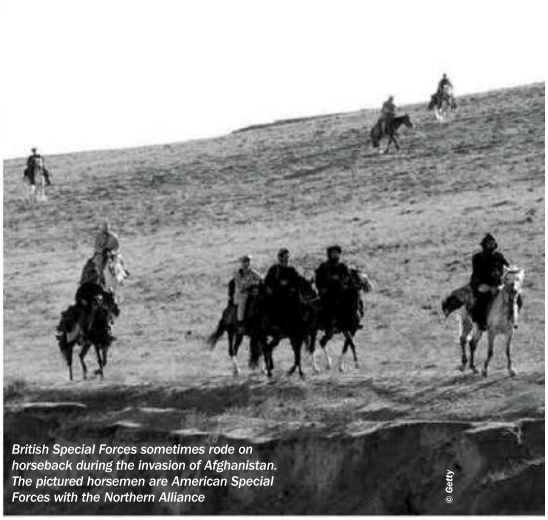


British Special Forces sometimes rode on horseback during the invasion of Afghanistan. The pictured horsemen are American Special Forces with the Northern Alliance

© Getty

The "Retreat from Kabul" in 1842 saw the destruction of an entire British Imperial army at the hands of the Emirate of Afghanistan

© Alamy

Despite being one of Britain's longest wars, why was Afghanistan often under-reported by the British media?

It's interesting because Afghanistan was one of Britain's most visible wars. There was a long period when it was on the news every night. Sadly, that tended to focus on British casualties, with 2009 being the bloodiest year. The focus on casualties began to dominate the coverage. The most famous pictures people have of Afghanistan are the infantry slogging through dusty fields or [fallen] soldiers being repatriated from planes at RAF Brize Norton and paraded back through Royal Wootton Bassett. That's tended to dominate our cultural understanding of what Afghanistan was. What is completely absent from popular memory is the good the British did in Afghanistan. They achieved positive change while they were there but it wasn't really covered.

What was also not covered much were the enormous sacrifices that Afghans were making alongside the British. The Afghan National Army and security forces suffered (and continue to suffer) thousands of casualties. The British were not fighting by themselves because they were training, mentoring and fighting alongside the Afghans. The cost to the Afghans was enormous and I don't think that was reported enough.

Additionally, the media narrative has tended to be on the effect on veterans. There are some who have unfortunately suffered psychological injuries alongside the physically wounded but the focus on them has detracted from the overall experience of soldiers who served there. That was not the majority experience and the picture was more complex. Our understanding of the campaign has to be more nuanced and I don't think it currently is.

'NEVER SAY NEVER'

What does the departure of America and NATO reveal about what was (or not) achieved in Afghanistan?

Everybody has a different perspective. There are people who are very proud of what they did during their tours in Afghanistan. There are people who believe it was a colossal waste of time, treasure and blood. Because the war is happening now it's a very emotive subject and it's very difficult to assess whether it was a success or failure.

I certainly don't think you can currently call Afghanistan a success given that a resurgent Taliban appears to be moving across the country again. However, there are positives from what the British were able to do. There was successful training and opportunities for people to see the human cost of war, which shouldn't be underestimated. Medical science was advanced to help people overcome severe injuries. Some of the medical techniques developed in Afghanistan have even made it into the NHS.

The question that everybody has to ask is: 'Was it worth it?' That includes the thousands of Afghan schoolgirls that went to school and life expectancy improvement. My own personal perspective will differ from other people and I would be arrogant to say that my opinion is more valid than theirs.

What we need to do as a British society is evaluate this and at least achieve some kind of consensus. There will be another time where we have a debate about militarily intervening somewhere around the globe. You saw it with Syria where the shadow of Afghanistan and Iraq meant that Britain did not directly intervene in the Syrian conflict – it was a direct legacy.

Given Britain's long association with Afghanistan, do you think its armed forces will return in the near future?

There are practical questions to ask about whether Britain can sustain a long-term deployment in Afghanistan again. A lot has changed in the armed forces even since 2014 because they've reduced in size and are currently going through a reorientation to strategic threats.

The most important question is whether the political will is there. The British armed forces do not decide who they fight. They are a tool of the British state and go where they are sent. Is the political will there to redeploy to Afghanistan? No. However, one legacy of Afghanistan is that you should say: "Never say never.' Do I think the British armed forces will return? No. Am I 100 per cent confident of ruling it out? No.

ROYAL AIR FORCE museum

The Royal Air Force Museum tells the story of Britain's aerial warfare force. With sites in London and at Cosford, Shropshire, the Museum is the principal resource for the UK's military aviation history. For more information visit: www.rafmuseum.org.uk

“YOU CAN’T CURRENTLY CALL AFGHANISTAN A SUCCESS ... HOWEVER, THERE ARE POSITIVES FROM WHAT THE BRITISH WERE ABLE TO DO”

© Getty

Soldiers from 21 Air Assault Battery, Royal Artillery silhouetted against the sky as they provide security for the Afghan National Police in Lashkar Gah, 17 May 2006

"SUDDENLY THERE CAME A MOMENT WHEN BOTH GUNS CEASED SIMULTANEOUSLY. IT MEANT BOTH CREWS WERE RELOADING AT THE SAME MOMENT. BY NOW HOLMES WAS WITHIN BOMBING DISTANCE. HE PULLED THE PIN OF THE GRENADE AND HURLED IT..."

Lieutenant-Colonel GF McFarland

Source: Wiki / PD / Art

Heroes of the Victoria Cross

THOMAS WILLIAM HOLMES

In the mud, shell holes and wire of Passchendaele, a daring Canadian soldier, having lied about his age, faced relentless enemy fire to single-handedly clear a pillbox, becoming the country's youngest VC recipient

WORDS **ALEX BOWERS**

Thomas William Holmes braved another glance from the relative safety of his cover. He saw the boggy mud surrounding his shell hole, the rain pelting down to turn the ridge to sludge, and the Germans on either side of the pillbox, who, having seen him, twisted their machine guns to fire a burst in his direction. He ducked in time, but only just. The bullets flew over his head as he lay prone once more, the boys from the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles (4th CMR) around him all wearing the same forlorn expression, not one knowing what to do. Holmes exhaled, his usual boyish grin nowhere to be seen, and decided for them. Grabbing two Mills bombs, he waited for the guns to go momentarily quiet, then, with one last exhale, he clambered out and ran.

The day was October 26, 1917, and Canadian Corps Commander Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie, against his wishes but overruled by Sir Douglas Haig, had launched an attack to dislodge the Germans from the area surrounding the Belgian village of Passchendaele. The Australians and New Zealanders had come before them, suffering tremendous losses to the well-entrenched enemy. Now it was up to the Canadian 4th Division to advance south of the flooded Ravebeek valley while the 3rd Division, including Holmes and his unit, led the northern assault on the Bellevue and Wallemollen spurs. Since 5:40am that morning, all had gone well enough. With the 4th CMR's C and D companies in front and A and B companies in close support, they had made excellent headway overcoming the first belt of blockhouses. But the Canadians had been checked northeast of the Wolf Copse objective. The hopes of much of the battle appeared to rest on the shoulders of one young man, scarcely older than a boy, as he charged forward. Except, arguably, he shouldn't even have been there.

***Left:** Known for his mischievousness and contagious smile, Thomas William Holmes was scarcely older than a boy when he became Canada's youngest VC recipient*

Holmes was from Owen Sound, Grey County, Ontario, and was a sturdy, stocky lad who, though somewhat short in stature at 166cm, made up for it in strength of body and heart. He was known for his mischievousness and good sense of humour, seldom failing to make those around him smile. By 17, he had already been recognised for his initiative, a trait that would ultimately serve him well when, on 20 December, 1915, he enlisted as a private soldier in the 147th (Grey) Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force while claiming to be 18 years old. His training took place at Camps Niagara and Borden before departing for Halifax, Nova Scotia. However, embarkation was delayed due to a diphtheria outbreak, leading to a brief stint in nearby Amherst before finally sailing aboard Titanic's famous sister ship, Olympic, bound for England. It was here that his unit was disbanded to supply reinforcements, with Tommy ending up in the 4th CMR ahead of its deployment to Vimy Ridge.

His first taste of action was not a lengthy affair. Within days of arriving at the now-notorious battle – often regarded in Canada as the nation's baptism of fire – he was wounded in the left arm and evacuated to England. There he met his older brother Roy, who had enlisted earlier in the 58th Battalion, CEF, after which he, too, had been wounded, losing an eye. Holmes recovered enough to re-join his unit in October 1917, in time for the campaign that would define his wartime legacy and earn him the respect of his comrades. He, along with his fellow Canadians, was about to go into action at Passchendaele.

Rushing the enemy

The German machine gun crews readied their weapons hastily as, to their horror, Holmes hurtled towards them with grenades at the ready. By the time the guns had been loaded, he had disappeared into a shell hole some yards ahead of his company. Moments later, he reappeared and rushed onwards before dashing into yet another crater. The bullets followed him. Then he waited, listening out for the short lulls of a few seconds as the guns were reloaded. Luck turned out to be on his side when both weapons ceased simultaneously. A fellow soldier saw what happened next: "Before those around him realised what he was about to do, he rushed forward and tossed a bomb so accurately… that [the crews] and their guns were put out of action. He then returned to his companions for more bombs… dashed forward, this time going directly up to the pillbox, and threw his bomb into the entrance, where it exploded…"

"BEFORE THOSE AROUND HIM REALISED WHAT HE WAS ABOUT TO DO, HE RUSHED FORWARD AND TOSSED A BOMB SO ACCURATELY INTO THE TRENCH OF THE MACHINE-GUN CREW THAT THEY AND THEIR GUN WERE PUT OUT OF ACTION"

Holmes' comrade and unit historian

Holmes had twice rushed the enemy position to silence the three emplacements bearing down on his unit. Moments later a total of 19 pillbox occupants surrendered. In a letter written to his family, Holmes said: "Fritzes [Germans] young and old, fat and thin came out with their hands up in the air… Fritz does not like the Canadians. The Canadians have won a name they will never lose." Nor would he be the only countryman to receive such renown on that grim October day. By nightfall, three soldiers had performed their duties so extraordinarily that they would be recommended for the Victoria Cross. These were Winnipeg native Christopher Patrick John O'Kelly, Scottish-Canadian Robert Shankland and a certain plucky youngster of the 4th CMR. Holmes' official citation reads: "By this act of valour at a very critical moment Pte. Holmes undoubtedly cleared the way for the advance of our troops and saved the lives of many of his comrades."

On 31 December, 1918, Holmes became Canada's then-youngest VC winner when King George V presented him with the medal. Later asked about the experience, Holmes reportedly noted that the king was "charmingly informal" but claimed that the only truly courageous thing he had done was go to Buckingham Palace. More courageous still, perhaps, was his confession to the king of England that he had lied about his age to join the army, despite being old enough by the time he performed his heroic act at Passchendaele. Holmes ended the war as a sergeant and would remain in Britain for a few more months before sailing home in the spring of 1919. He received a hero's welcome upon arriving back in Owen Sound on 14 April of that year, sharing the acclaim with fellow resident and VC recipient William Avery 'Billy' Bishop.

In 1921, Holmes married Annie Middaugh, with whom he had two children – Roy and June. He eventually moved to Toronto and worked for the Harbour Commission for several years, first as a truck driver then as a chauffeur, with summer stints as a boat pilot. However, his fighting days were not yet over.

Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie believed that the battle would cost 16,000 Canadian killed or wounded. His prediction was eerily accurate, with 15,654 casualties

Images © Getty

Left to right: Henry Howey Robson, VC; Charles Smith Rutherford, VC; Walter Leigh Rayfield, VC; William Merrifield, VC; and Tommy Holmes, VC

Holmes' post-war life was almost as eventful as his military career. He saved three people from a 1936 boating accident and survived his launch exploding in 1942

Holmes' next battle was a struggle against tuberculosis, which he had contracted during his time in the trenches. He would win. Then, in 1935, his home was burgled and his Victoria Cross stolen. It was never recovered – the king instead sent a replacement. Just one year later, in 1936, Holmes made headlines again when he saved the lives of three people whose auxiliary cabin boat had capsized, though, tragically, he was unable to save a fourth person, who drowned. He himself had a brush with death in 1942 after the motorboat he was aboard exploded, leaving him with severe burns and other injuries. Poor health caused by an already years-long fight against cancer forced him to retire. This fight he would lose, and he died on 4 January, 1950, aged 51.

Having been buried with full military honours, Holmes' legacy lives on. A plaque dedicated to his life and service, unveiled by his sister Annie King in the late 1950s, today stands across from the Owen Sound Public Library, while the Grey and Simcoe Foresters, which perpetuates the 147th (Grey) Battalion, has named its armoury after him. Every Remembrance Day, the unit fires a volley over his grave, which is located a short distance away from the late Billy Bishop and Second World War VC winner Major David Vivian Currie. Holmes' daughter June donated his medal to the Royal Canadian Legion Branch in Owen Sound. In August 1978, it, like the original, was stolen but thankfully recovered – minus the ribbon – and returned to its rightful place. It is now on display to help tell his remarkable story. Also well-suited to recount his tale is George Auer, an Owen Sound military historian and award-winning author of *The Day the Ravebeek Ran Grey*, who has this to say of the man: "As the Canadian Expeditionary Force's youngest recipient of the Victoria Cross, Tommy Holmes is evidence that the realities of war are often masked by the innocence of youth."

M3 LEE

These Medium Tanks served to restock Britain's sparse supply of armoured vehicles in the wake of the retreat from France

WORDS **CRAIG MOORE**

75MM HIGH-EXPLOSIVE SHELLS
M3 Medium Tanks were able to fire effective high-explosive shells at artillery and anti-tank batteries. Most British cruiser and infantry tanks armed with the two-pounder guns only fired armour-piercing shells that were of little use against such targets.

ARMOUR PROTECTION
The front upper and lower hull armour was 51mm thick; the middle front section, side and rear armour was 38mm thick. The turret was made from cast metal and was 50mm thick at the front, sides and rear.

RIVETED ARMOUR
The tank's hull armour plate was riveted together. When the hull was hit by a shell, bits of metal would fly around the inside of the tank, killing and injuring the crew. Future M3 Medium Tanks would be welded.

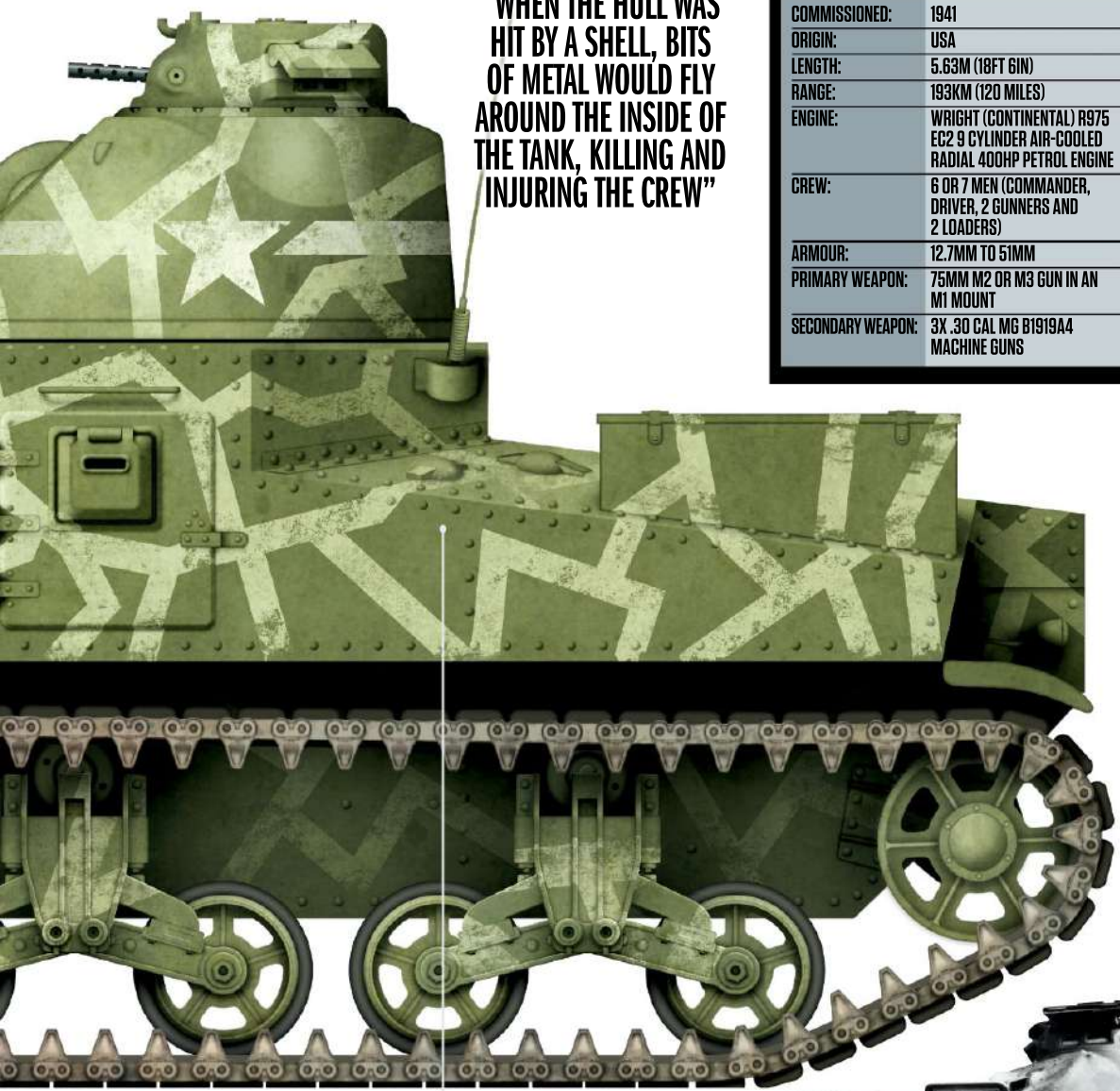
In June 1940, the British lost or abandoned most of their armoured vehicles prior to the evacuation from Dunkirk, so a British 'Tank Mission' headed by Michael Dewar went to the United States to negotiate the purchase of new tanks. The delegation wanted US factories to build British-designed tanks, but this was unacceptable to the Americans. They would only provide tanks that the US Army had approved for production. Dewar placed an initial order for 685 M3 Lee Medium Tanks with a modified turret that did not have the anti-aircraft .30 cal machine gun installed in a raised commander's cupola. Minor changes were also made to the fighting compartment.

Its modular design enabled parts to be replaced in battlefield workshops. Unlike the German Army, who could transport damaged tanks on railway flats back to factories for repair, these tanks would have to be repaired in the field. The front of the tank could be unbolted to allow the transmission and final drive to be replaced, and damaged road wheels and suspension bogies could be unbolted and replaced. With the help of a block and tackle on a frame, its engine could also be removed and replaced.

M3 LEE MEDIUM TANK

COMMISSIONED:	1941
ORIGIN:	USA
LENGTH:	5.63M (18FT 6IN)
RANGE:	193KM (120 MILES)
ENGINE:	WRIGHT (CONTINENTAL) R975 EC2 9 CYLINDER AIR-COOLED RADIAL 400HP PETROL ENGINE
CREW:	6 OR 7 MEN (COMMANDER, DRIVER, 2 GUNNERS AND 2 LOADERS)
ARMOUR:	12.7MM TO 51MM
PRIMARY WEAPON:	75MM M2 OR M3 GUN IN AN M1 MOUNT
SECONDARY WEAPON:	3X .30 CAL MG B1919A4 MACHINE GUNS

"WHEN THE HULL WAS HIT BY A SHELL, BITS OF METAL WOULD FLY AROUND THE INSIDE OF THE TANK, KILLING AND INJURING THE CREW"



PRODUCTION FIGURES

Between June 1941 and August 1942, 4,924 M3 Medium Tanks were built. Between January 1942 and December 1942, 1,334 different variants of the Medium Tank M3 were built. (M3A1: 300, M3A2: 12, M3A3: 322, M3A4: 109, M3A5: 591). The British received 2,887 Lend-Lease M3 tanks.

The tank's modular design enabled it to be repaired in battlefield workshops

© Alamy

ARMAMENT

The US tank designers noted that the Panzer IV was armed with a short-barrelled 75mm gun. The larger American-built 75mm gun was modified to fit the M3 tank hull on the front-right side. (In 1940 US tank turrets could not be fitted with such a large gun.) A 37mm M2 or M3 gun was fixed in the turret in an M24 gun mount. The tank had two .30 cal. MG M1919A4 Browning machine guns fixed in the front glacis plate and another coaxial in the turret.

Above, top-left: *There were racks inside the tank to stow the crew's guns*

Above, left: *The 37mm turret gun was aimed through the M2 periscope, and it also sighted the coaxial .30 cal. M1919A4 Browning machine gun*

Above: *The traverse and elevation of the 75mm gun were controlled by hand wheels*

The American-built 75mm gun was modified and placed on the front-right side of the tank

© Alamy

***Left:** The exhaust system vented in two fishtail-shaped pipes. This restored M3 Lee is at the Armourgeddon Military Museum in Leicestershire*

The turret was armed with a 37mm gun and a coaxial .30 cal. M1919A4 Browning machine gun

DESIGN

The British were not happy with the high profile of the M3 tank, and the tall cupola was removed and replaced with a flat circular split hatch on British versions. The initial design of the bogie assembly could not cope with the weight of the tank, so it was strengthened with heavier volute springs and the placement of the track return roller on top of the unit. Originally the M3 had a crew of seven but this was reduced to six; the driver took over the responsibility operating the radio.

ENGINE

The M3 Lee Medium Tank was powered by a Wright (Continental) R975 EC2 nine-cylinder air-cooled radial 400hp petrol engine that was installed in the rear of the tank behind a bulkhead that separated the crew from the engine. A long propeller shaft transmitted the power forward through the controlled differential, transmission and final drive to the front sprocket wheels which moved the tracks. It could cruise at 34kph on a level road and hit 39kph for short periods on a level road. Its maximum range was 193km.

***Above:** The M3 Lee was powered by a Wright (Continental) R975 EC2 nine-cylinder air-cooled radial 400hp petrol engine.*

A crew of six operated the M3, with the driver also operating the vehicle's radio

© Alamy

Ammunition was stowed in the ready racks on the walls of the turret and turret basket next to the crew seats

The 75mm gunner's position was on the right of the tank. The driver's dashboard and tillers were in the middle

CREW COMPARTMENT

The commander sat in the turret; below him was the 37mm gun loader and gunner. The 75mm gun in the tank hull was operated by an additional gunner and loader. The driver sat in the middle of the tank at the front. Early tanks had a seventh crewman who operated the radio – the driver took over this function in later M3 Lee tanks. The rear of the British M3 Grant tank turrets was extended to enable the radio to be placed in the turret near the commander.

© Alamy

Over 1,000 of the M3 tanks were also sent to Russia

SERVICE HISTORY

In the early months of 1942, the first M3 Medium Tanks arrived in North Africa during a lull in fighting. This enabled British crews to train in their new tanks. Problems with malfunctioning 75mm ammunition, sand in the engine and dust filters, plus engine lubricants, were discovered and corrected. On 27 May 1942, British M3 Medium Tanks knocked out a German Panzer III and IV at a range of around 900 metres, which was beyond the effective range of the enemy tank guns. Many M3 Medium Tanks were shipped to Australia at the end of the North African campaign and used to attack Japanese forces in Burma and various Pacific islands. Most were used in an infantry support role as they rarely encountered enemy tanks. Russia received 1,386 M3s.

"ON 27 MAY 1942, BRITISH M3 MEDIUM TANKS KNOCKED OUT A GERMAN PANZER III AND IV AT A RANGE OF AROUND 900 METRES – BEYOND THE EFFECTIVE RANGE OF THE ENEMY TANK GUNS"

M3 Medium Tanks arrived in North Africa in the early part of 1942

The turret was made of cast metal. The turret ring was protected from bullet splash by a ring guard

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This month 80 years ago, Kiev fell to the Nazis

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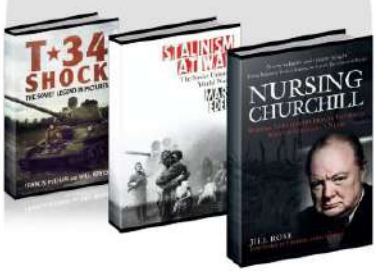
The latest film and book reviews



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Artefact of War: 17th C. Dutch armour

MUSEUMS & EVENTS

Discover WWII hiking trails in Western Europe, a renovated Scottish regimental museum and English Heritage's substantial guide to the Battle of Hastings

Hiking to Liberation

A pan-European cultural foundation has launched a new series of trails where walkers can visit key WWII battlegrounds from 1944-45

Liberation Route Europe (LRE) Foundation is an international network connecting people and organisations that preserve and value the memory, meaning and heritage of WWII. It organises and manages projects and events and has national branches, members and partners around the world. It has recently announced a certified Council of Europe 'Cultural Route' connecting places and people that mark Europe's liberation from occupation during WWII. This is a new European-wide system of hiking trails along the 'Liberation Route Europe' – a transnational itinerary that links main regions along the advance of Allied forces during 1944-45.

Developed in collaboration with hiking associations across Europe, the new trails link museums, memorials, cemeteries and historical sites along the Allied forces' advance in the last phase of WWII and aim to stretch for 10,000km. The hiking experience is accompanied by the new LRE website and travel planner. This allows the public to read and listen to many stories about the war and plan their journey along the trails.

Renowned architect Daniel Libeskind has designed a symbolic family of trail markers called 'Vectors of Memory' that honours the people, places and stories found throughout the European landscape. To complete the experience along the Liberation Route Europe, the Foundation has created 'Audio Spots'. Originating in the Arnhem-Nijmegen region in 2008, there are now over 200 audio spots in the Netherlands and Germany. Told in English, Dutch and German, the spots enable visitors to read and listen about what happened at a specific location during 1944-45. These link major, well-known events with personal stories and experiences.

On 22 July 2021, the LRE Foundation, in collaboration with the Best Defence Foundation, escorted several American veterans who served in Germany in 1945 for a visit to the German-Russian Museum and Allied Museum in Berlin. The German-Russian Museum is located at the site of the unconditional surrender of Germany on 8 May 1945 while the Allied Museum honours the commitment of the Western Powers in defending West Berlin's freedom. The veterans then attended the online international launch of the LRE hiking trails.

Rémi Praud, Managing Director of the LRE Foundation says: "We are excited to launch this new system of hiking trails connecting regions, sites and historical places across Europe. These trails are a new, meaningful and sustainable way to experience the Liberation Route Europe. This is only the beginning. We are excited to expand to new regions and countries in the upcoming years."

The online launch of the LRE Foundation's hiking trails was broadcast to the international press and public

American WWII veterans pictured in Berlin for the launch of Liberation Route Europe's new hiking trails

Veterans are taken on a tour around a museum in Berlin

Images: Liberation Route Europe Foundation

For more on the Liberation Route Europe hiking trails visit: www.liberationroute.com

The LRE Foundation's hiking trails originated in the Arnhem-Nijmegen region – the scene of Operation Market Garden in 1944

© Getty

Highlanders at Stirling

The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Regimental Museum at Stirling Castle has reopened following an ambitious renovation

Created in 1881, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were a British Army line infantry regiment. First seeing action during the Second Boer War, the regiment was expanded to a peak size of 15 battalions during WWI. It also served during the Irish War of Independence, WWII, the Korean War and Aden Emergency among several other conflicts. It was amalgamated with other Scottish infantry units in 2006 and is now part of the Royal Regiment of Scotland.

The Argyll and Sutherlands' regimental museum is located within Stirling Castle. Housed in a building constructed in the 1490s, the museum was closed for a £4 million refurbishment in 2018 but it has now reopened. With over 5,000 objects in its collection, all renovation work has been carried out with meticulous care. Work has included opening up original vaults on the ground floor, creating new a floor to house displays and improved access.

The renovation project director, Colonel A K Miller, says: "This project has taken nine years to plan and deliver. With the loss of Scotland's historic regiments, it is important to ensure this unique element of our history is not lost." Richard Hickson, CEO of the museum, adds: "We approach an incredibly important achievement as we prepare to reopen our doors after almost three years of hard work. Setting itself against the broader history of Scotland, our museum tells a fascinating story covering significant periods in Scottish history."

For more information visit: www.argylls.co.uk

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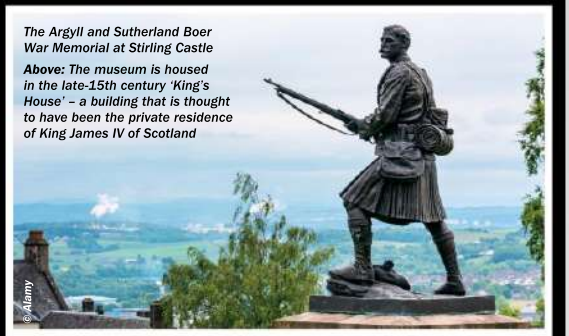
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The Argyll and Sutherland Boer War Memorial at Stirling Castle

***Above:** The museum is housed in the late-15th century 'King's House' – a building that is thought to have been the private residence of King James IV of Scotland*

Retracing the Conquest

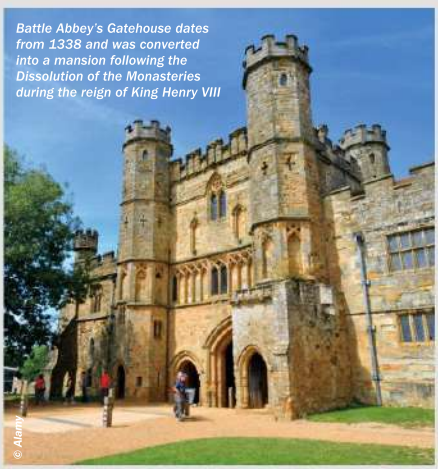
The site of the Battle of Hastings contains an informative visitor centre, battlefield trails and a beautiful Norman abbey

The Battle of Hastings is one of the decisive events in English history, with William the Conqueror's victory over King Harold II resulting in the Norman Conquest of England. William subsequently constructed Battle Abbey on the battlefield on the orders of the pope as penance for the shedding of so much blood. The abbey is reputedly said to stand on the spot where Harold was killed and is still an impressive structure.

The battlefield of Hastings is now a peaceful part of East Sussex and its history can be explored in great detail. Managed by English Heritage, visitors can begin experiencing 1066 at the visitor centre. It has an introductory film that vividly retells the story of the battle along with new interactive displays. Battle Abbey can be also be explored with highlights including a 13th century rib-vaulted Novices Common Room and the Gatehouse. The latter contains a multimedia exhibition examining the story of the abbey after 1066 with original artefacts as well as a panoramic view across the battlefield.

Away from the abbey, a battlefield trail contains carved wooden sculptures depicting Norman and Anglo-Saxon soldiers, and visitors learn about the full course of the battle with an audio guide.

***Below:** The Battle of Hastings is re-enacted every year on the battlefield*


© Alamy

Battle Abbey's Gatehouse dates from 1338 and was converted into a mansion following the Dissolution of the Monasteries during the reign of King Henry VIII

© Getty

For more information – including special events for English Heritage members – visit: www.english-heritage.org.uk

WWII THIS MONTH...

SEPTEMBER 1941

To commemorate 80 years since the Second World War, **History of War** will be taking a look at some of the key events taking place during each month of the conflict

Source: Wiki / PD / Gov

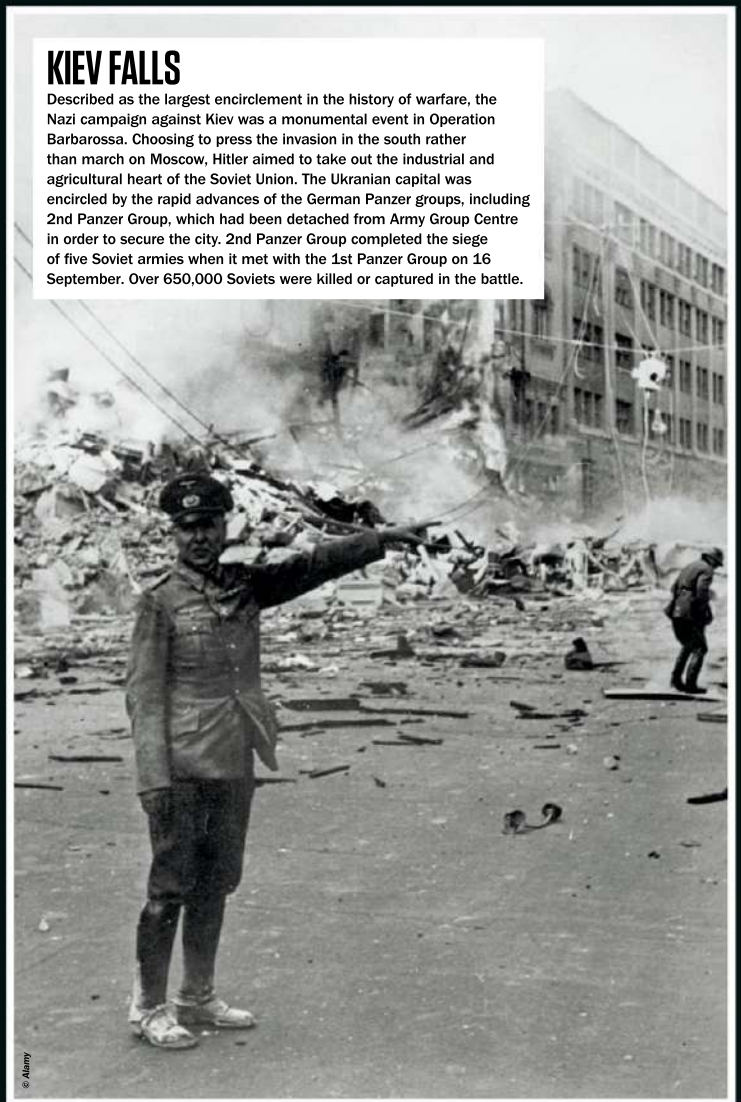
SECOND BATTLE OF CHANGSHA

The second battle for the capital of Hunan province, southern China, saw around 120,000 Japanese soldiers attack the Chinese Nationalist troops defending the city. The first battle for the city had taken place two years earlier, when a heavily outnumbered Japanese assault had been thrown back by forces under Chinese General Xue Yue. On 27 September a new offensive against Changsha began with small Japanese units attempting to infiltrate the Chinese defensive lines. After days of bloody street fighting the Japanese were once again repelled, into the neighbouring Yueyang region, having suffered around 10,000 casualties.

© Getty

KIEV FALLS

Described as the largest encirclement in the history of warfare, the Nazi campaign against Kiev was a monumental event in Operation Barbarossa. Choosing to press the invasion in the south rather than march on Moscow, Hitler aimed to take out the industrial and agricultural heart of the Soviet Union. The Ukranian capital was encircled by the rapid advances of the German Panzer groups, including 2nd Panzer Group, which had been detached from Army Group Centre in order to secure the city. 2nd Panzer Group completed the siege of five Soviet armies when it met with the 1st Panzer Group on 16 September. Over 650,000 Soviets were killed or captured in the battle.


© Alamy

RED ARMY IN IRAN

Red Army soldiers pictured in the streets of Tabriz, Iran, during the Anglo-Soviet Invasion of Iran. Beginning in August and concluding on 17 September, the Allied attack on Iran, codenamed Operation Countenance, was a surprise to the shah Reza Shah Pahlavi, who though neutral was considered friendly towards the Axis. British forces invaded from neighbouring Iraq and against the harbour of Abadan in the south, and Soviet forces invaded from across the Soviet border and the Caspian Sea.

"A YANK IN THE RAF"

Tyrone Power and Betty Grable starred in *A Yank in the RAF*, directed by Henry King and released in September 1941. In the film, pilot Tim Baker (Power) finds himself ferrying bombers from the USA to England, where he bumps into ex-girlfriend Carol Brown (Grable), who has joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Reportedly including actual combat footage, and made with cooperation from No. 602 Squadron, the film was released while the USA was still officially neutral, though it was one of several pro-British Hollywood productions made prior to 1942.

© Getty

REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books and films

PLAN A

THIS HARROWING TALE OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS PLOTTING REVENGE IS A STUNNING REMINDER OF THE DEPTHS MANKIND CAN SINK TO

Studio: Signature Entertainment **Director:** Doron Paz & Yoav Paz **Released:** 3 September (cinemas) & 13 September (DVD)

Reeling from the carnage of its total defeat in WWII, Germany in 1945 is portrayed as an unforgiving, rubble-strewn land seemingly devoid of law, order or a shred of remorse in this achingly tragic elegy on loss and the primal desire for revenge.

Plan A is based on real events and wastes no time in exposing the desperate plight of Germany's Jews by asking the viewer what they would do if their entire family had been murdered. It centres around the efforts of a death camp survivor by the name of Max as he searches for his wife and child in a country that has become a lawless wasteland in which nobody is safe.

Upon encountering a band of Jewish vigilantes belonging to a group named Nakam (a biblical term for 'revenge'), Max (played by the hauntingly brilliant August Diehl) travels to Nuremberg in the hopes of joining the group and aiding them in their ambitious plot to poison Germany's water supply. "Six million for six million," seethes Anna (a mother of a murdered child and one of the vigilantes, played by the superb Sylvia Hoeks).

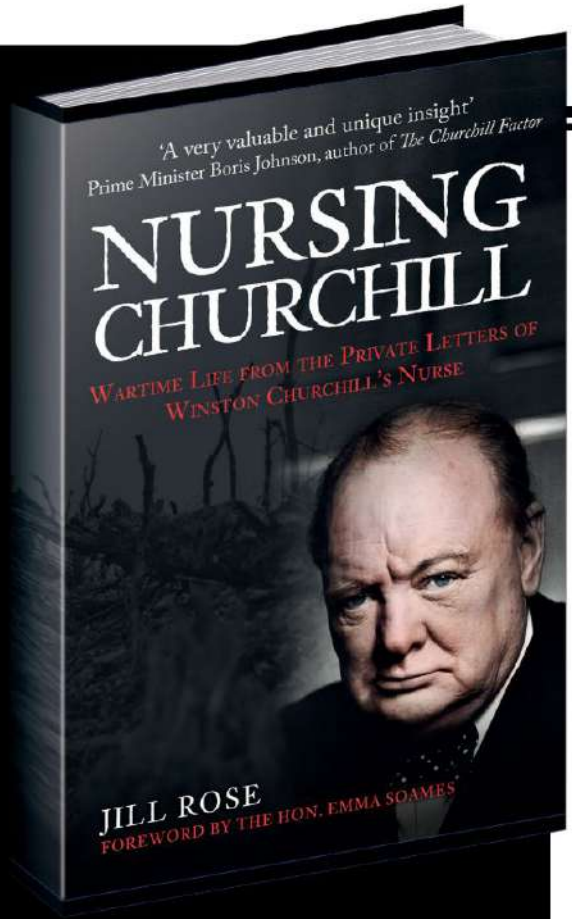
Pursued by a former ally of Max's, the network of would-be avengers scrape a living rebuilding the city's water plant while waiting for the 'medicine' they need to fulfil their appalling plan. It's a plan that the agent hoping to stop them fears will prevent Jews from settling peacefully in Israel.

An honest, empathetic man at heart, Max gradually slides towards the abyss, dragged to the edge by an entirely understandable yet misguided thirst for revenge that has already blinded those around him. The end of their mission, when it comes, is both disturbing and clever in its execution – a conclusion that feels as though Max was destined to reach from the very beginning, but one that forks in diametrically opposed directions. **CG**

NURSING CHURCHILL

THE HUMAN AND SELDOM-SEEN SIDE OF WINSTON CHURCHILL IS REVEALED BY THE NURSE WHO LOOKED AFTER HIM WHEN HE WAS STRICKEN WITH PNEUMONIA IN 1943

Author: Jill Rose **Publisher:** Amberley **Price:** £9.99
Released: 15 September


'A very valuable and unique insight'
Prime Minister Boris Johnson, author of The Churchill Factor
NURSING CHURCHILL
WARTIME LIFE FROM THE PRIVATE LETTERS OF WINSTON CHURCHILL'S NURSE
JILL ROSE
FOREWORD BY THE HON. EMMA SOAMES

"The patient is all he is cracked up to be." So wrote Doris Miles to her husband, who was serving in the Royal Navy during the Second World War. It was February 1943, with the outcome of the war still very much in the balance, and the patient in question was none other than Winston Churchill, who had returned from a whirlwind month of visits to Morocco, Egypt, Turkey and Cyprus. As he dined privately with his wife, the Prime Minister was taken ill with a high temperature, which was diagnosed by his doctor Sir Charles Wilson as pneumonia.

Wilson hired Dorothy Pugh and Doris Miles, two staff nurses from the private wing of St Mary's Hospital, to attend Churchill. On the evening of 19 February, Miles was told to go immediately to the Prime Minister's residence as night nurse. Miles soon realised that getting Churchill to stay in bed was one thing – getting him to rest was quite another. Three days into the job, she noted: "PM kept finger on bell pretty much all day." Churchill was not about to allow some trifle like pneumonia slow him down, despite being urged by King George VI to "take this opportunity for a rest".

Miles's daughter Jill Rose has assembled a collection of her mother's letters and personal observations of her "difficult patient" at that critical time during the war. The book provides a fascinating insight into those precarious days in Churchill's life. It is clear that Miles developed what can only be described as a fascination with the "old boy" and his daily routine, starting with his habit of rising at noon and never going to bed before 2am. "What a man," she exclaims in one of her letters. **JS**

© Getty

After an informal luncheon party on Christmas Day to celebrate his recovery from pneumonia, Winston Churchill, dressed in his siren suit and dressing gown, is photographed with his guests in Carthage

THE CHAMPION OF AUSCHWITZ

A WELL-INTENTIONED BUT ULTIMATELY FLAT PORTRAIT OF A REMARKABLE SURVIVOR

Certificate: 15 **Director:** Maciej Barczewski
Cast: Piotr Glowacki, Rafal Zawierucha, Marcin Czarnik, Marian Dziedziel **Released:** 3 September

Tadeusz 'Teddy' Pietrzykowski, a bantamweight-class fighter, had a promising future ahead of him as a pugilist and in 1937 he was crowned Warsaw Champion. Two calamities then unfolded: a career-wrecking injury and the invasion of Poland by the Wehrmacht. After being captured and imprisoned by the Gestapo, the former boxer was tortured, interrogated and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of the first mass transport. There, he became known as Prisoner #77 and for two years Pietrzykowski was forced to box with SS guards and fellow internees. For winning, he was rewarded with extra food rations and his choice of work assignments.

Directed by Maciej Barczewski, *The Champion of Auschwitz* is a heavily abridged and rather lacklustre biopic that is devoid of dramatic punch. It all feels a bit rote, and it's also lumbered with didactic scoring arrangements that scream at the audience to feel things instead of letting the images and storytelling guide the viewer's response. This is a shame, because this should be a powerfully delivered real-life tale of mental and physical endurance, of struggle in a place of constant fear and endless death, of the indomitable human spirit and its ability to remain untouched in the most dreadful of circumstances.

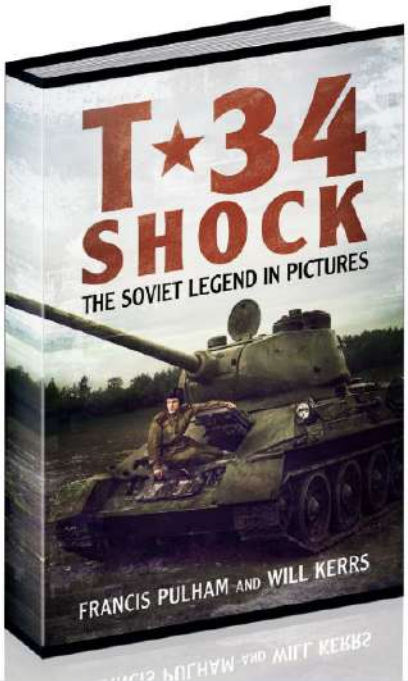
The film's production design creates a level of grim reality regarding the look of the camp, while the symbolic use of light is simple but effective at conveying Pietrzykowski's inner resolve and tremendous courage. At just 91 minutes long, including opening and closing credits, the pace is simply too brisk and the storytelling suffers as a result. As it sleepwalks through Holocaust and boxing movie clichés, a feeling of superficiality dominates. **MC**

T-34 SHOCK

THE SOVIET LEGEND IN PICTURES

A WELCOME DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF THE ICONIC TANK

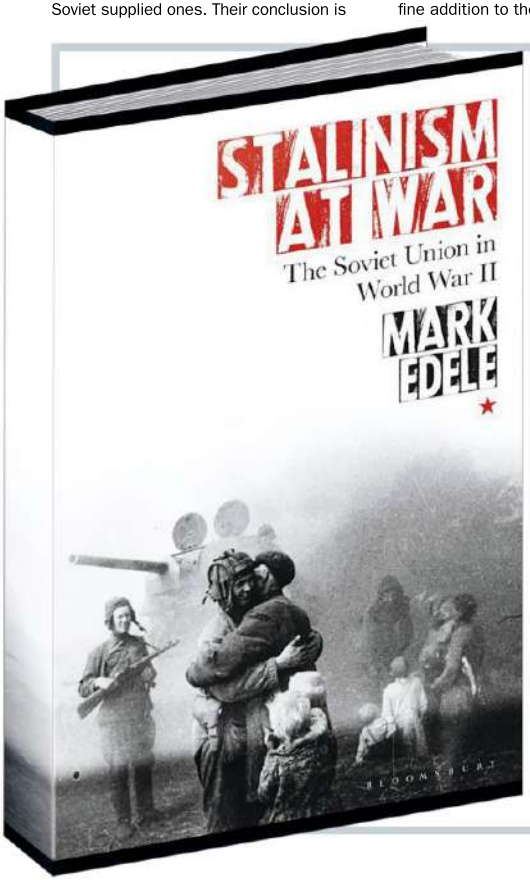
Authors: Francis Pulham and Will Kerrs **Publisher:** Fonthill **Price:** £40



The Soviet T-34 medium tank needs no introduction. It remains a perennial source of fascination and is hugely popular with readers and publishers alike. This engrossing study by two self-confessed T-34 nerds really deserves the subtitle 'definitive guide'; instead 'The Soviet Legend in Pictures' rather undersells it. Clearly a labour of love, the book is lavishly illustrated with excellent photos, colour plates and scale drawings.

The authors meticulously catalogue every type of T-34-76 and T-34-85 ever built, including the post-war foreign copies. Interestingly, they discuss in some detail whether China actually built the T-34 as the Type 58 in the 1950s or simply repaired-Soviet supplied ones. Their conclusion is the latter. They expertly guide us through the myriad of variants and upgrades. In addition, they also cover the assault guns and tank destroyers based on the T-34 chassis, which were built to emulate the success of the German Sturmgeshütz.

In the name of being balanced, the authors rather side-step the issue of whether the T-34 was the best tank of the Second World War. Their view is that there were so many production variants built at different stages of the war it is unwise to generalise. Nonetheless, this is a minor gripe. On the basis of the array of photos alone this book is well-worth purchasing. For any tank enthusiast, restorer or modeller this volume will make a very fine addition to their shelves. **ATJ**



STALINISM AT WAR

AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF HOW THE BRUTAL STALINIST SYSTEM WAS VICTORIOUS IN RUSSIA'S DARKEST HOUR

Author: Mark Edele **Publisher:** Bloomsbury **Price:** £25
Released: 23 September

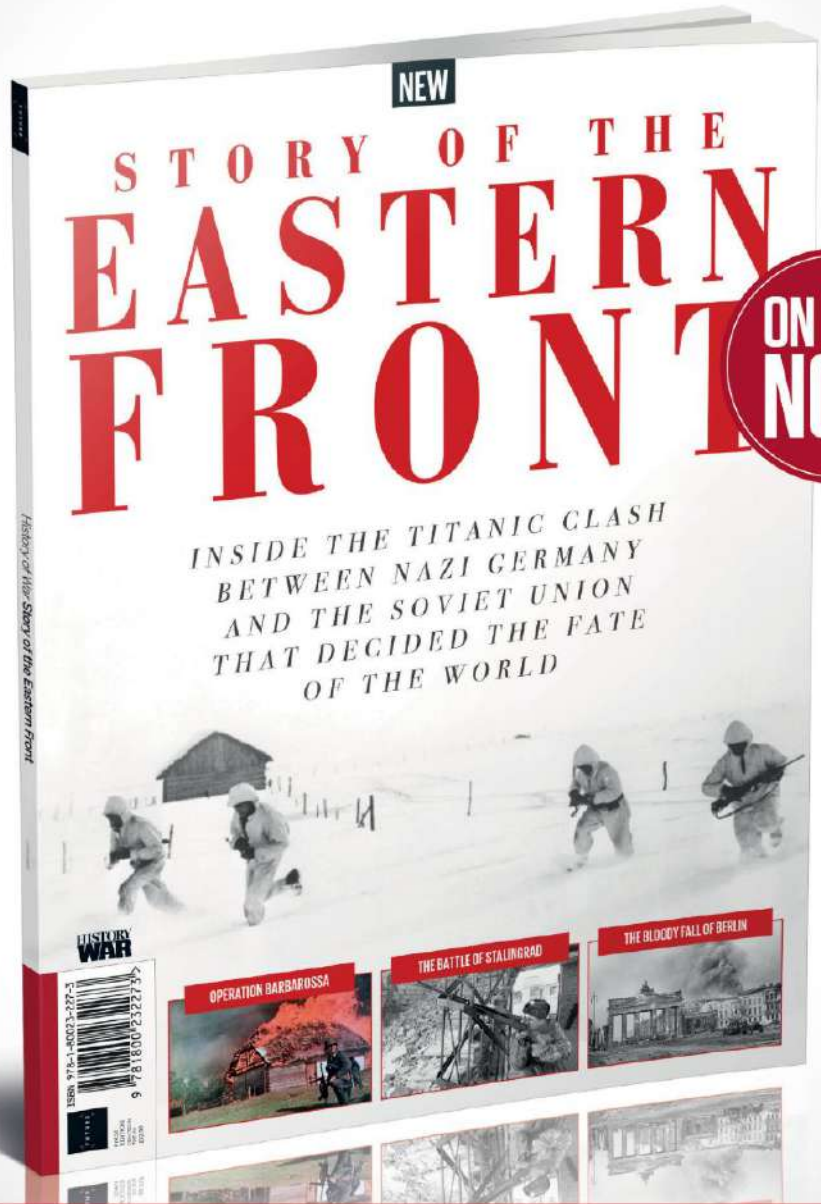
Mass murderer, saviour of the fatherland, merciless tyrant, war hero -- there can be little doubt that Joseph Stalin ranks as the most controversial political figure of the 20th century. As late as 1950, at the height of the Cold War, even the USA's *Columbia Encyclopedia* spoke of the "public worship" bestowed on this retiring figure of "conciliatory aloofness", a champion of peace in the run up to the Second World War.

Mark Edele offers a fascinating account of the Soviet Union from 1937 to 1949, focusing on the key role played by Stalin in propelling the Allies to victory over Germany and Japan. Stalin's forces faced the largest number of German troops and killed more of them than any of the Allies, albeit at a cost of 27 million war-related deaths, or about 12 per cent of the Soviet Union's pre-war population. "In Europe," the author states, "the war was essentially won by the Red Army." In relating his tale, Edele looks at a wide range of topics such as the history of international politics and military operations, along with the culture and society of the wartime years. The result is an anthology of war experience combined with the historian's bird's eye view of larger social, economic, cultural and governmental structures.

Stalin did not keep a diary or leave memoirs, hence the author relies on the views of those who knew him, as well as the traces he left in the archives. Edele unites the military, economic and political history of the Soviet Union in a narrative that is at once engaging and authoritative. It is a sobering reality, he maintains, that the victory of the Stalinist system was celebrated in a war cult which became one of the major pillars of the late USSR social and cultural order. Thanks to Stalin, it commemorated not just the war, but also the ruler and his regime. **JS**

UNCOVER THE HORRORS OF THE BLOODIEST THEATRE IN THE HISTORY OF WARFARE

The battle for supremacy on the Eastern Front of WWII was arguably the most brutal conflict in human history, an existential struggle without mercy. From Stalingrad to Berlin, this is the story of a fight that would reshape the world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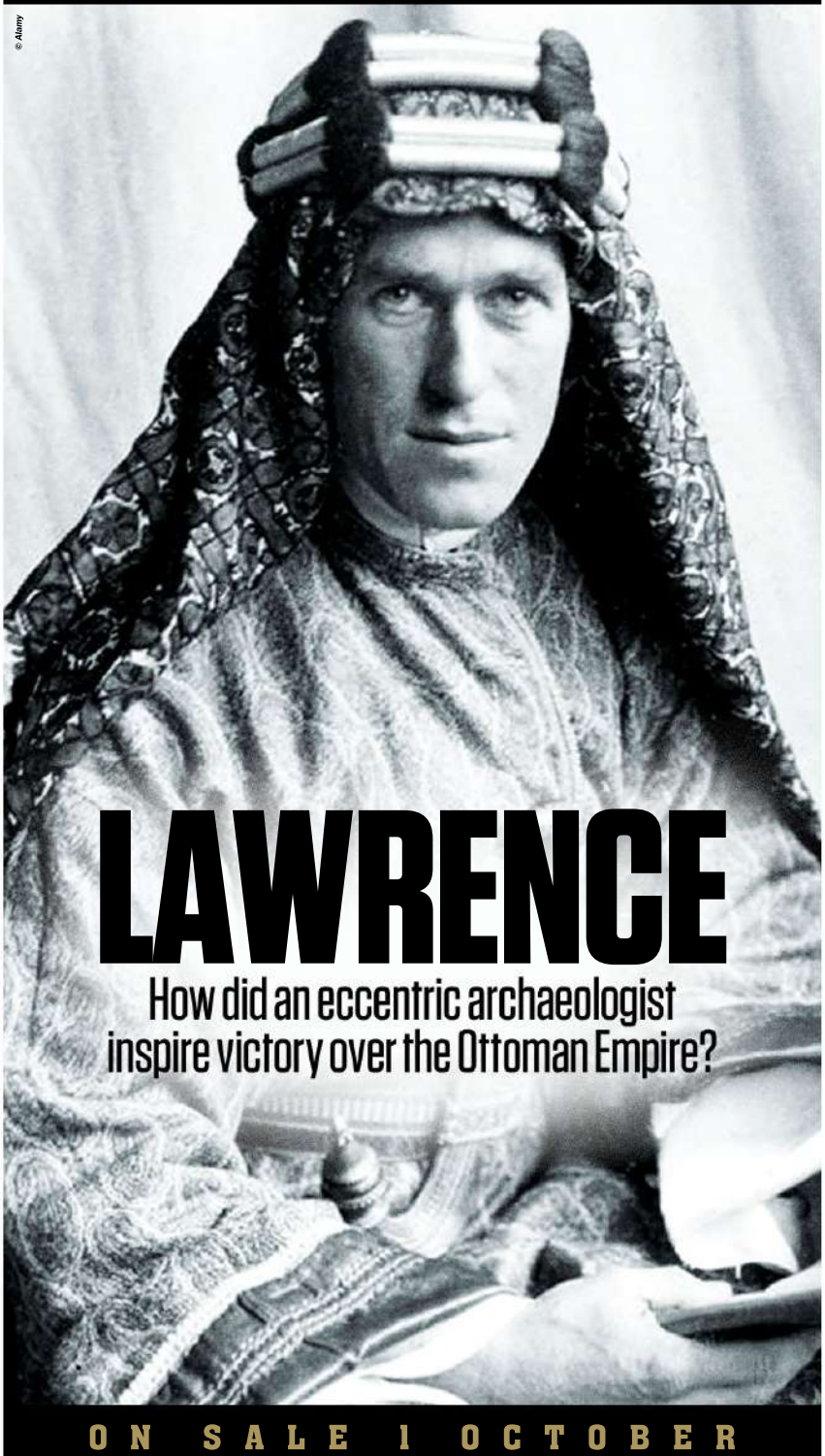

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17TH CENTURY

DUTCH ARMOUR

This damaged suit of armour was worn by Admiral Jacob van Heemskerck, who was killed fighting the Spanish during the Battle of Gibraltar

By 1607, the Dutch Republic had been fighting Spain for almost 40 years and the conflict was only halfway through what would become known as the Eighty Years' War. After being defeated at the Siege of Ostend in 1604, the Dutch increased their naval campaign by disrupting Spanish shipping, particularly along the southern coast of Spain.

On 25 April 1607, a Dutch fleet of 26 warships commanded by Admiral Jacob van Heemskerck attacked 22 anchored Spanish ships (including ten galleons) in the Bay of Gibraltar. Van Heemskerck commanded the Dutch flagship Aeolus and targeted his opposite number in the Spanish vessel San Augustin. As the two ships engaged, a cannonball smashed through Van Heemskerck's left leg while he was wearing this suit of armour, killing him. His second-in-command, Pieter Verhoeff, took command of the Dutch fleet but did not reveal the death of Van Heemskerck for the duration of the battle.

The Spanish commander, Juan Álvarez de Ávila, was also killed as the Dutch wreaked havoc on the Spanish ships. One vessel exploded, spreading fire to other ships and causing the Spanish fleet to disintegrate. The San Augustin raised the white flag but the Dutch refused to accept the surrender. They instead rowed among the wreckage of the Spanish ships and killed enemy survivors in the water.

The Spanish suffered heavy casualties, as many 4,000 sailors, and the majority of their ships were destroyed. Gibraltar became a famous Dutch naval victory and Van Heemskerck was buried with full military honours in Amsterdam. His armour was hung above his tomb, although the left cuisse (thigh defence) was – and remains – missing after it was shattered by the cannonball that killed the admiral.

***Below:** A 1621 depiction of the Battle of Gibraltar by Dutch Golden Age painter Cornelis Claesz van Wieringen*

© Getty

Jacob van Heemskerck's armour dates from the late 16th century. For many years it was displayed with his sword above his tomb in Amsterdam's medieval Oude Kerk ('Old Church')

RIJKS MUSEUM

Jacob van Heemskerck's armour is displayed in Amsterdam's famous Rijksmuseum, the largest museum in the Netherlands. For more information visit:

www.rijksmuseum.nl

Image: Rijksmuseum

AIRFIX

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Mould Tools made in 1965, pack illustration by Roy Cross, 1965. *Enjoy the nostalgia with Airfix Vintage Classics.*

An elegant four engined biplane airliner from the early days of passenger air travel, the Handley Page H.P 42 was designed to serve the Empire air routes into the Middle East, Africa and India, carrying its passengers in some style. With the engines mounted well away from the passenger cabin, travel in the H.P 42 was relatively quiet and likened to travelling in a first class pullman railway carriage, which is just as well, because the aircraft's cruising speed of just 105 mph meant that any journey was likely to be a long one. The pride of Britain's pioneering Imperial Airways fleet, this giant airliner was an attempt to regain passenger flight supremacy from the German aviation industry and at the time of its introduction, it had the distinction of being the largest passenger aircraft in regular use in the world.

HANDLEY PAGE H.P.42W (H.P.45 WESTERN)
'Heracles' and 'Helena', Imperial Airways, London, 1931.Length

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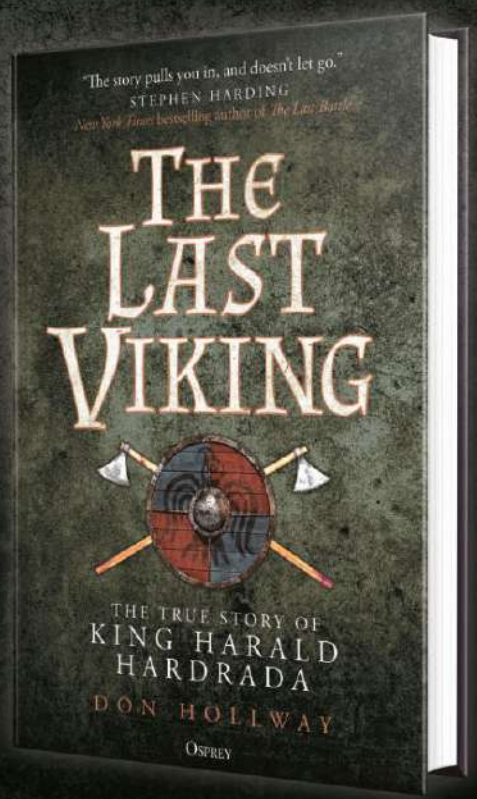
The king of the East
Has been drawn westward
Toward a glorious death.
That is my destiny.
There the ravens
Will pick their fill
From the sovereign's warriors.
I'll be there to feed them.

KING HARALD'S SAGA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